PREPARATION FOR A CHRISTIAN LIFE

I[1]

"COME HITHER UNTO ME,
ALL YE THAT LABOR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN,
AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST."
(MATTHEW 11,28.)

THE INVITATION

I

"C o m e h i t h e r!"—It is not at all strange if he who is in danger and needs help—speedy, immediate help, perhaps—it is not strange if he cries out: "come hither"! Nor it is strange that a quack cries his wares: "come hither, I cure all maladies"; alas, for in the case of the quack it is only too true that it is the physician who has need of the sick. "Come hither all ye who at extortionate prices can pay for the cure—or at any rate for the medicine; here is physic for everybody—who can pay; come hither!"
In all other cases, however, it is generally true that he who can help must be sought; and, when found, may be difficult of access; and, if access is had, his help may have to be implored a long time; and when his help has been implored a long time, he may be moved only with difficulty, that is, he sets a high price on his services; and sometimes, precisely when he refuses payment or generously asks for none, it is only an expression of how infinitely high he values his services. On the other hand, he[2] who sacrificed himself, he sacrifices himself, here too; it is indeed he who seeks those in need of help, is himself the one who goes about and

calls, almost imploringly: "come hither!" He, the only one who can help, and help with what alone is indispensable, and can save from the one truly mortal disease, he does not wait for people to come to him, but comes himself, without having been called; for it is he who calls out to them, it is he who holds out help—and what help! Indeed, that simple sage of antiquity[3] was as infinitely right as the majority who do the opposite are wrong, in setting no great price, whether on himself or his instruction; even if he thus in a certain sense proudly expressed the utter difference in kind between payment and his services. But he was not so solicitous as to beg any one to come to him, notwithstanding—or shall I say because?—he was not altogether sure what his help signified; for the more sure one is that his help is the only one obtainable, the more reason has he, in a human sense, to ask a great price for it; and the less sure one is, the more reason has he to offer freely the possible help he has, in order to do at least something for others. But he who calls himself the Savior, and knows that he is, he calls out solicitously: "come hither unto me!"

"Come hither a l l y e!"—Strange! For if he who, when it comes to the point, perhaps cannot help a single one—if such a one should boastfully invite everybody, that would not seem so very strange, man's nature being such as it is. But if a man is absolutely sure of being able to help, and at the same time willing to help, willing to devote his all in doing so, and with all sacrifices, then he generally makes at least one reservation; which is, to make a choice among those he means to help. That is, however willing one may be, still it is not everybody one cares to help; one does not care to sacrifice one's self to that extent. But he, the only one who can really help, and really help everybody—the only one, therefore, who really can invite everybody—he makes no conditions whatever; but utters the invitation which, from the beginning of the world, seems to have been reserved for him: "Come hither all ye!" Ah, human self--sacrifice, even when thou art most beautiful and noble, when we admire thee most: this is a sacrifice still greater, which is, to sacrifice every provision for one's own self, so that in one's willingness to help there is not even the least partiality. Ah, the love that sets no price on one's self, that makes one forget altogether that he is the helper, and makes one altogether blind as to who it is one helps, but infinitely careful only that he be a sufferer, whatever else he may be; and thus willing

unconditionally to help everybody—different, alas! in this from everybody!

"Come hither u n t o m e!" Strange! For human compassion also, and willingly, does something for them that labor and are heavy laden; one feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, makes charitable gifts, builds charitable institutions, and if the compassion be heartfelt, perhaps even visits those that labor and are heavy laden. But to invite them to come to one, that will never do, because then all one's household and manner of living would have to be changed. For a man cannot himself live in abundance, or at any rate in well•being and happiness, and at the same time dwell in one and the same house together with, and in daily intercourse with, the poor and miserable, with them that labor and are heavy laden! In order to be able to invite them in such wise, a man must himself live altogether in the same way, as poor as the poorest, as lowly as the lowliest, familiar with the sorrows and sufferings of life, and altogether belonging to the same station as they, whom he invites, that is, they who labor and are heavy laden. If he wishes to invite a sufferer, he must either change his own condition to be like that of the sufferer, or else change that of the sufferer to be like his own; for if this is not done the difference will stand out only the more by contrast. And if you wish to invite all those who suffer—for you may make an exception with one of them and change his condition—it can be done only in one way, which is, to change your condition so as to live as they do; provided your life be not already lived thus, as was the case with him who said: "Come hither unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden!" Thus said he; and they who lived with him saw him, and behold! there was not even the least thing in his manner of life to contradict it. With the silent and truthful eloquence of actual performance his life expresses—even though he had never in his life said these words—his life expresses: "Come hither unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden"! He abides by his word, or he him-self is the word; he is what he says, and also in this sense he is the Word.[4]

"A l l y e t h a t l a b o r a n d a r e h e a v y l a d e n." Strange! His only concern is lest there be a single one who labors and is heavy laden who does not hear this invitation. Neither does he fear that too many will come. Ah, heart-room makes house•room; but where wilt thou find heart-room, if not in his heart? He

leaves it to each one how to understand his invitation: he has a clear conscience about it, for he has invited all those that labor and are heavy laden.

But what means it, then, to labor and be heavy laden? Why does he not offer a clearer explanation so that one may know exactly whom he means, and why is he so chary of his words? Ah, thou narrow-minded one, he is so chary of his words, lest he be narrow•minded; and thou narrow•hearted one, he is so chary of his words lest he be narrow•hearted. For such is his love—and love has regard to all—as to prevent any one from troubling and searching his heart whether he too be among those invited. And he who would insist on a more definite explanation, is he not likely to be some self•loving person who is calculating whether this explanation does not particularly fit himself; one who does not consider that the more of such exact explanations are offered, the more certainly some few would be left in doubt as to whether they were invited? Ah man, why does thine eye see only thyself, why is it evil because he is good?[4a] The invitation to all men opens the arms of him who invites, and thus he stands of aspect everlasting; but no sooner is a closer explanation attempted which might help one or the other to another kind of certainty, than his aspect would be transformed and, as it were, a shadow of change would pass over his countenance.

"I w i l l g i v e y o u r e s t." Strange! For then the words "come hither unto me" must be understood to mean: stay with me, I am rest; or, it is rest to remain with me. It is not, then, as in other cases where he who helps and says "come hither" must afterwards say: "now depart again," explaining to each one where the help he needs is to be found, where the healing herb grows which will cure hirn, or where the quiet spot is found where he may rest frorn labor, or where the happier continent exists where one is not heavy laden. But no, he who opens his arms, inviting every one—ah, if all, all they that labor and are heavy laden came to him, he would fold them all to his heart, saying: "stay with me now; for to stay with me is rest." The helper himself is the help. Ah, strange, he who invites everybody and wishes to help everybody, his manner of treating the sick is as if calculated for every sick man, and as if every sick man who comes to him were his only patient. For otherwise a physician divides his time among many patients who, however great their number, still are far, far from being all mankind. He will prescribe the medicine, he will say what is to be done, and how it is to be

used, and then he will go—to some other patient; or, in case the patient should visit him, he will let him depart. The physician cannot remain sitting all day with one patient, and still less can he have all his patients about him in his home, and yet sit all day with one patient without neglecting the others. For this reason the helper and his help are not one and the same thing. The help which the physician prescribes is kept with him by the patient all day so that he may constantly use it, whilst the physician visits him now and again; or he visits the physician now and again. But if the helper is also the help, why, then he will stay with the sick man all day, or the sick man with him—ah, strange that it is just this helper who invites all men!

II

COME HITHER ALL YE THAT LABOR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN, I WILL GIVE YOU REST.

What enormous multiplicity, what an almost boundless adversity, of people invited; for a man, a lowly man, may, indeed, try to enumerate only a few of these diversities—that he who invites must invite all men, even if every one especially and individually.

The invitation goes forth, then—along the highways and byways, and along the loneliest paths; aye, goes forth ere there is a path so lonely that one man only, and no one else, knows of it, and goes forth where there is but one track, the track of the wretched one who fled along that path with his misery, that and no other track; goes forth even where there is no path to show how one may return: even where the invitation penetrates and by itself easily and surely finds its way back—most easily, indeed, when it brings the fugitive along to him that issued the invitation. Come hither, come hither all ye, also thou, and thou, and thou, too, thou loneliest of all fugitives!

Thus the invitation goes forth and remains standing, wheresoever there is a parting of the ways, in order to call out. Ah, just as the trumpet call of the soldiers is directed to the four quarters of the globe, likewise does this invitation sound

wherever there is a meeting of roads; with no uncertain sound—for who would then come?—but with the certitude of eternity.

It stands by the parting of the ways where worldly and earthly sufferings have set down their crosses, and calls out: Come hither, all ye poor and wretched ones, ye who in poverty must slave in order to assure yourselves, not of a care•free, but of a toilsome, future; ah, bitter contradiction, to have to slave for—a s s u r i n g one's self of that under which one groans, of that which one f l e e s! Ye despised and overlooked ones, about whose existence no one, aye, no one is concerned, not so much even as about some domestic animal which is of greater value! Ye sick, and halt, and blind, and deaf, and crippled, come hither!—Ye bed •ridden, aye, come hither, ye too; for the invitation makes bold to invite even the bed•ridden—to come! Ye lepers; for the invitation breaks down all differences in order to unite all, it wishes to make good the hardship caused by the difference in men, the difference which seats one as a ruler over millions, in possession of all gifts of fortune, and drives another one out into the wilderness—and why? (ah, the cruelty of it!) because (ah, the cruel human inference!) b e c a u s e he is wretched, indescribably wretched. Why then? Because he stands in need of help, or at any rate, of compassion. And why, then? Because human compassion is a wretched thing which is cruel when there is the greatest need of being compassionate, and compassionate only when, at bottom, it is not true compassion! Ye sick of heart, Ye who only through your anguish learned to know that a man's heart and an animal's heart are two different things, and what it means to be sick at heart—what it means when the physician may be right in declaring one sound of heart and yet heart•sick; ye whom faithlessness deceived and whom human sympathy—for the sympathy of man is rarely late in coming—whom human sympathy made a target for mockery; all ye wronged and aggrieved and ill•used; all ye noble ones who, as any and everybody will be able to tell you, deservedly reap the reward of ingratitude (for why were ye simple enough to be noble, why foolish enough to be kindly, and disinterested, and faithful)—all ye victims of cunning, of deceit, of backbiting, of envy, whom baseness chose as its victim and cowardice left in the lurch, whether now ye be sacrificed in remote and lonely places, after having crept away in order to die, or whether ye be trampled underfoot in the thronging crowds where no one asks

what rights ye have, and no one, what wrongs ye suffer, and no one, where ye smart or how ye smart, whilst the crowd with brute force tramples you into the dust—come ye hither!

The invitation stands at the parting of the ways, where death parts death and life. Come hither all ye that sorrow and ye that vainly labor! For indeed there is rest in the grave; but to sit by a grave, or to stand by a grave, or to visit a grave, all that is far from lying in the grave; and to read to one's self again and again one's own words which he knows by heart, the epitaph which one devised one's self and understands best, namely, who it is that lies buried h e r e, all that is not the same as to lie buried one's self. In the grave there is rest, but by the grave there is no rest; for it is said: so far and no farther, and so you may as well go home again. But however often, whether in your thoughts or in fact, you return to t h a t grave—you will never get any farther, you will not get away from the spot, and this is very trying and is by no means rest. Come ye hither, therefore: here is the way by which one may go farther, here is rest by the grave, rest from the sorrow over loss, or rest in the sorrow of loss—through him who everlastingly re•unites those that are parted, and more firmly than nature unites parents with their children, and children with their parents—for, alas! they were parted; and more closely than the minister unites husband and wife—for, alas! their separation did come to pass; and more indissollubly than the bond of friendship unites friend with friend—for, alas! it was broken. Separation penetrated everywhere and brought with it sorrow and unrest; but here is rest!—Come hither also ye who had your abodes assigned you among the graves, ye who are considered dead to human society, but neither missed nor mourned—not buried and yet dead; that is, belonging neither to life nor to death; ye, alas! to whom human society cruelly closed its doors and for whom no grave has as yet opened itself in pity—come hither, ye also, here is rest, and here is life!

The invitation stands at the parting of the ways, where the road of sin turns away from the inclosure of innocence—ah, come hither, ye are so close to him; but a single step in the opposite direction, and ye are infinitely far from him. Very possibly ye do not yet stand in need of rest, nor grasp fully what that means; but still follow the invitation, so that he who invites may save you from a predicament out of which it is so difficult and dangerous to be saved; and so that,

being saved, ye may stay with him who is the Savior of all, likewise of innocence. For even if it were possible that innocence be found somewhere, and altogether pure: why should not innocence also need a savior to keep it safe from evil?—The invitation stands at the parting of the ways, where the road of sin turns away, to enter more deeply into sin. Come hither all ye who have strayed and have been lost, whatever may have been your error and sin: whether one more pardonable in the sight of man and nevertheless perhaps more frightful, or one more terrible in the sight of man and yet, perchance, more pardonable; whether it be one which became known here on earth or one which, though hidden, yet is known in heaven—and even if ye found pardon here on earth without finding rest in your souls, or found no pardon because ye did not seek it, or because ye sought it in vain: ah, return and come hither, here is rest!

The invitation stands at the parting of the ways, where the road of sin turns away for the last time and to the eye is lost in perdition. Ah, return, return, and come hither! Do not shrink from the difficulties of the retreat, however great; do not fear the irksome way of conversion, however laboriously it may lead to salvation; whereas sin with winged speed and growing pace leads forward or—downward, so easily, so indescribably easy—as easily, in fact, as when a horse, altogether freed from having to pull, cannot even with all his might stop the vehicle which pushes him into the abyss. Do not despair over each relapse which the God of patience has patience enough to pardon, and which a sinner should surely have patience enough to humble himself under. Nay, fear nothing and despair not: he that sayeth "come hither," he is with you on the way, from him come help and pardon on that way of conversion which leads to him; and with him is rest.

Come hither all, all ye—with him is rest; and he will raise no difficulties, he does but one thing: he opens his arms. He will not first ask you, you sufferer—as righteous men, alas, are accustomed to, even when willing to help—"Are you not perhaps yourself the cause of your misfortune, have you nothing with which to reproach yourself?" It is so easy to fall into this very human error, and from appearances to judge a man's success or failure: for instance, if a man is a cripple, or deformed, or has an unprepossessing appearance, to infer that therefore he is a bad man; or, when a man is unfortunate enough to suffer reverses so as to be

ruined or so as to go down in the world, to infer that therefore he is a vicious man. Ah, and this is such an exquisitely cruel pleasure, this being conscious of one's own righteousness as against the sufferer—explaining his afflictions as God's punishment, so that one does not even—dare to help him; or asking him that question which condemns him and flatters our own righteousness, before belping him. But he will not ask you thus, will not in such cruel fashion be your benefactor. And if you are yourself conscious of your sin he will not ask about it, will not break still further the bent reed, but raise you up, if you will but join him. He will not point you out by way of contrast, and place you outside of himself, so that your sin will stand out as still more terrible, but he will grant you a hiding place within him; and hidden within him your sins will be hidden. For he is the friend of sinners. Let him but behold a sinner, and he not only stands still, opening his arms and saying "come hither," nay, but he stands—and waits, as did the father of the prodigal son; or he does not merely remain standing and waiting, but goes out to search, as the shepherd went forth to search for the strayed sheep, or as the woman went to search for the lost piece of silver. He goes—nay, he has gone, but an infinitely longer way than any shepherd or any woman, for did he not go the infinitely long way from being God to becoming man, which he did to seek sinners?

III

COME HITHER UNTO ME
ALL YE THAT LABOR AND ARE HEAVYLADEN,
AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST.

"C o m e h i t h e r!" For he supposes that they that labor and are heavy laden feel their burden and their labor, and that they stand there now, perplexed and sighing—one casting about with his eyes to discover whether there is help in sight anywhere; another with his eyes fixed on the ground, because he can see no consolation; and a third with his eyes staring heavenward, as though help was bound to come from heaven—but all seeking. Therefore he sayeth: "come hither!" But he invites not him who has ceased to seek and to sorrow.•"C o m e h

i t h e r!" For he who invites knows that it is a mark of true suffering, if one walks alone and broods in silent disconsolateness, without courage to confide in any one, and with even less self•confidence to dare to hope for help. Alas, not only he whom we read about was possessed of a dumb devil.[5] No suffering which does not first of all render the sufferer dumb is of much significance, no more than the love which does not render one silent; for those sufferers who run on about their afflictions neither labor nor are heavy laden. Behold, therefore the inviter will not wait till they that labor and are heavy laden come to him, but calls them lovingly; for all his willingness to help might, perhaps, be of no avail if he did not say these words and thereby take the first step; for in the call of these words: "come hither unto me!" he comes himself to them. Ah, human compassion—sometimes, perhaps, it is indeed praiseworthy self•restraint, sometimes, perhaps, even true compassion, which may cause you to refrain from questioning him whom you suppose to be brooding over a hidden affliction; but also, how often indeed is this compassion but worldly wisdom which does not care to know too much! Ah, human compassion—how often was it not pure curiosity, and not compassion, which prompted you to venture into the secret of one afflicted; and how burdensome it was—almost like a punishment of your curiosity—when he accepted your invitation and came to you! But he who sayeth these redeeming words "Come hither!" he is not deceiving himself in saying these words, nor will he deceive you when you come to him in order to find rest by throwing your burden on him. He follows the promptings of his heart in saying these words, and his heart follows his words; if you then follow these words, they will follow you back again to his heart. This follows as a matter of course—ah, will you not follow the invitation?—"C o m e h i t h e r!" For supposes that they that labor and are heavy laden are so orn out and overtaxed, and so near swooning that they have forgotten, as though in a stupor, that there is such thing as consolation. Alas, or he knows for sure that there is no consolation and no help unless it is sought from him; and therefore must he call out to them "Come hither!"

"C o m e h i t h e r!" For is it not so that every society has some symbol or token which is worn by those who belong to it? When a young girl is adorned in a

certain manner one knows that she is going to the dance: Come hither all ye that labor and are heavy laden—come hither! You need not carry an external and visible badge; come but with A- your head anointed and your face washed, if only you labor in your heart and are heavy laden.

"Come hither!" Ah, do not stand still and consider; nay, consider, consider that with every moment you stand still after having heard the invitation you will hear the call more faintly and thus withdraw from it, even though you are standing still.—"Come hither!" Ah, however weary and faint you be from work, or from the long, long and yet hitherto fruitless search for help and salvation, and even though you may feel as if you could not take one more step, and not wait one more moment, without dropping to the ground: ah, but this one step and here is rest!—"Come hither!" But if, alas, there be one who is so wretched that he cannot come?—Ah, a sigh is sufficient; your mere sighing for him is also to come hither.

THE PAUSE

COME HITHER UNTO ME
ALL YE THAT LABOR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN,
AND I SHALL GIVE YOU REST.

Pause now! But what is there to give pause? That which in the same instant makes all undergo an absolute change—so that, instead of seeing an immense throng of them that labor and are heavy laden following the invitation, you will in the end behold the very opposite, that is, an immense throng of men who flee back shudderingly, scrambling to get away, trampling all down before them; so that, if one were to infer the sense of what had been said from the result it produced, one would have to infer that the words had been "*procul o procul este profani"*, rather than "come hither"—that gives pause which is infinitely more important and infinitely more decisive: THE PERSON OF HIM WHO INVITES.

Not in the sense that he is not the man to do what he has said, or not God, to keep what he has promised; no, in a very different sense.

Pause is given by the fact that he who invites is, and insists on being, the definite historic person he was 1800 years ago, and that he as this definite person, and living under the conditions then obtaining, spoke these words of invitation.—He is not, and does not wish to be, one about whom one may simply know something from history (i.e. world history, history proper, as against Sacred History) ; for from history one cannot "learn" anything about him, the simple reason being that nothing can be "known" about him.—He does not wish to be judged in a human way, from the results of his life; that is, he is and wishes to be, a rock of offense and the object of faith. To judge him after the consequences of his life is a blasphemy, for being God, his life, and the very fact that he was then living and really did live, is infinitely more important than all the consequences of it in history.

a.

Who spoke these words of invitation?

He that invites. Who is he? Jesus Christ. Which Jesus Christ? He that sits in glory on the right side of his Father? No. From his seat of glory he spoke not a single word. Therefore it is Jesus Christ in his lowliness, and in the condition of lowliness, who spoke these words.

Is then Jesus Christ not the same? Yes, verily, he is today, and was yesterday, and 1800 years ago, the same who abased himself, assuming the form of a servant—the Jesus Christ who spake these words of invitation. It is also he who hath said that he would return again in glory. In his return in glory he is, again, the same Jesus Christ; but this has not yet come to pass.

Is he then not in glory now? Assuredly, that the Christian b e l i e v e s. But it was in his lowly condition that he spoke these words; he did not speak them from

his glory. And about his return in glory nothing can be known, for this can in the strictest sense be a matter of belief only. But a believer one cannot become except by having gone to him in his lowly condition—to him, the rock of offense and the object of faith. In other shape he does not exist, for only thus did he exist. That he will return in glory is indeed expected, but can be expected and believed only by him who believes, and has believed, in him as he was here on earth.

Jesus Christ is, then, the same; yet lived he 1800 years ago in debasement, and is transfigured only at his return. As yet he has not returned; therefore he is still the one in lowly guise about whom we believe that he will return in glory. Whatever he said and taught, every word he spoke, becomes *eo ipso* untrue if we give it the appearance of having been spoken by Christ in his glory. Nay, he is silent. It is the l o w l y Christ who speaks. The space of time between (i.e. between his debasement and his return in glory) which is at present about 1800 years, and will possibly become many times 1800—this space of time, or else what this space of time tries to make of Christ, the worldly information about him furnished by world history or church history, as to who Christ was, as to who it was who really spoke these words—all this does not concern us, is neither here nor there, but only serves to corrupt our conception of him, and thereby renders untrue these words of invitation.

It is untruthful of me to impute to a person words which he never used. But it is likewise untruthful, and the words he used likewise become untruthful, or it becomes untrue that he used them, if I assign to him a nature essentially unlike the one he had when he did use them. Essentially unlike; for an untruth concerning this or the other trifling circumstance will not make it untrue that "he" said them. And therefore, if it please God to walk on earth in such strict incognito as only one all•powerful can assume, in guise impenetrable to all men; if it please him—and why he does it, for what purpose, that he knows best himself; but whatever the reason and the purpose, it is certain that the incognito is of essential significance—I say, if it please God to walk on earth in the guise of a servant and, to judge from his appearance, exactly like any other man; if it please him to teach men in this guise—if, now, any one repeats his very words, but gives the saying the appearance that it was God that spoke these words: then it is untruthful; for it is untrue that he said these words.

b.

Can one from history[6] learn to know anything about Christ?

No. And why not? Because one cannot "know" anything at all about "Christ"; for he is the paradox, the object of faith, and exists only for faith. But all historic information is communication of "knowledge." Therefore one cannot learn anything about Christ from history. For whether now one learn little or much about him, it will not represent what he was in reality. Hence one learns something else about him than what is strictly true, and therefore learns nothing about him, or gets to know something wrong about him; that is, one is deceived. History makes Christ look different from what he looked in truth, and thus one learns much from history about—Christ? No, not about Christ; because about him nothing can be "known," he can only be believed.

c.

Can one prove from history that Christ was God?

Let me first ask another question: is any more absurd contradiction thinkable than wishing to PROVE (no matter, for the present, whether one wishes to do so from history, or from whatever else in the wide world one wishes to prove it) that a certain person is God? To maintain that a certain person is God—that is, professes to be God—is indeed a stumbling block in the purest sense. But what is the nature of a stumbling block? It is an assertion which is at variance with all (human) reason. Now think of proving that! But to prove something is to render it reasonable and real. Is it possible, then, to render reasonable and real what is at variance with all reason? Scarcely; unless one wishes to contradict one's self. One can prove only that it is at variance with all reason. The proofs for the divinity of Christ given in Scripture, such as the miracles and his resurrection from the grave

exist, too, only for faith; that is, they are no "proofs," for they are not meant to prove that all this agrees with reason but, on the contrary, are meant to prove that it is at variance with reason and therefore a matter of faith.

First, then, let us take up the proofs from history. "Is it not 1800 years ago now that Christ lived, is not his name proclaimed and reverenced throughout the world, has not his teaching (Christianity) changed the aspect of the world, having victoriously affected all affairs: has then history not sufficiently, or more than sufficiently, made good its claim as to who he was, and that he was•God?" No, indeed, history has by no means sufficiently, or more than sufficiently, made good its claim, and in fact history cannot accomplish this in all eternity.

However, as to the first part of the statement, it is true enough that his name is proclaimed throughout the world—as to whether it is reverenced, that I do not presume to decide. Also, it is true enough that Christianity has transformed the aspect of the world, having victoriously affected all affairs, so victoriously indeed, that everybody now claims to be a Christian.

But what does this prove? It proves, at most, that Jesus Christ was a great man, the greatest, perhaps, who ever lived. But that he was God—stop now, that conclusion shall with God's help fall to the ground.

Now, if one intends to introduce this conclusion by assuming that Jesus Christ was a man, and then considers the 1800 years of history (i.e. the consequences of his life), one may indeed conclude with a constantly rising superlative: he was great, greater, the greatest, extraordinarily and astonishingly the greatest man who ever lived. If one begins, on the other hand, with the assumption (of faith) that he was God, one has by so doing stricken out and cancelled the 1800 years as not making the slightest difference, one way or the other, because the certainty of faith is on infinitely higher plane. And one course or the other one must take; but we shall arrive at sensible conclusions only if we take the latter.

If one takes the former course one will find it impossible—unless by committing the logical error of passing over into different category—one will find it impossible in the conclusion suddenly to arrive at the new category "God"; that is, one cannot make the consequence, or consequences, of—a man's life suddenly prove at a certain point in the argument that this man was God. If such a procedure were correct one ought to be able to answer satisfactorily a question

like this: what must the consequence be, how great the effects, how many centuries must elapse, in order to infer from the consequences of a man's life—for such was the assumption—that he was God; or whether it is really the case that in the year 300 Christ had not yet been entirely proved to be God, though certainly the most extraordinarily, astonishingly, greatest man who had ever lived, but that a few more centuries would be necessary to prove that he was God. In that case we would be obliged to infer that people the fourth century did not look upon Christ as God, and still less they who lived in the first century; whereas the certainty that he was God would grow with every century. Also, that in our century this certainty would be greater than it had ever been, a certainty in comparison with which the first centuries hardly so much as glimpsed his divinity. You may answer this question or not, it does not matter.

In general, is it at all possible by the consideration of the gradually unfolding consequences of something to arrive at conclusion different in quality from what we started with? Is it not sheer insanity (providing man is sane) to let one's judgment become so altogether confused as to land in the wrong category? And if one begins with such a mistake, then how will one be able, at any subsequent point, to infer from the consequences of something, that one has to deal with an altogether different, in fact, infinitely different, category? A foot•print certainly is the consequence of some creature having made it. Now I may mistake the track for that of, let us say, a bird; whereas by nearer inspection, and by following it for some distance, I may make sure that it was made by some other animal. Very good; but there was no infinite difference in quality between iny first assumption and my later conclusion. But can I on further consideration and following the track still further, arrive at the conclusion: therefore it was a spirit—a spirit that leaves no tracks? Precisely the same holds true of the argument that from the consequences of a human life—for that was the assumption—we may infer that therefore it was God.

Is God then so like man, is there so little difference between the two that, while in possession of my right senses, I may begin with the assumption that Christ was human? And, for that matter, has not Christ himself affirmed that he was God? On the other hand, if God and man resemble each other so closely, and are related to each other to such a degree—that is, essentially belong to the same category of

beings, then the conclusion "therefore he was God" is nevertheless just humbug, because if that is all there is to being God, then God does not exist at all. But if God does exist and, therefore, belongs to a category infinitely different from man, why, then neither I nor any one else can start with the assumption that Christ was human and end with the conclusion that therefore he was God. Any one with a bit of logical sense will easily recognize that the whole question about the consequences of Christ's life on earth is incommensurable with the decision that he is God. In fact, this decision is to be made on an altogether different plane: man must decide for himself whether he will believe Christ to be what he himself affirmed he was, that is, God, or whether he will not believe so.

What has been said—mind you, providing one will take the time to understand it—is sufficient to make a logrical mind stop drawing any inferences from the consequences of Christ's life: that therefore he was God. But faith in its own right protests against every attempt to approach Jesus Christ by the help of historical information about the consequences of his life. Faith contends that this whole attempt is b l a s p h e m o u s. Faith contends that the only proof left unimpaired by unbelief when it did away with all the other proofs of the truth of Christianity, the proof which—indeed, this is complicated business—I say, which unbelief invented in order to prove the truth of Christianity—the proof about which so excessively much ado has been made in Christendom, the proof of 1800 years: as to this, faith contends that it is—b l a s p h e m y.

With regard to a man it is true that the consequences of his life are more important than his life. If one, then, in order to find out who Christ was, and in order to find out by some inference, considers the consequences of his life: why, then one changes him into a man by this very act—a man who, like other men, is to pass his examination in history, and history is in this case as mediocre an examiner as any half•baked teacher in Latin.

But strange! By the help of history, that is, by considering the consequences of his life, one wishes to arrive at the conclusion that therefore, therefore he was God; and faith makes the exactly opposite contention that he who even begins with this syllogism is guilty of blasphemy. Nor does the blasphemy consist in assuming hypothetically that Christ was a man. No, the blasphemy consists in the thought which lies at the bottom of the whole business, the thought without which

one would never start it, and of whose validity one is fully and firmly assured that it will hold also with regard to Christ—the thought that the consequences of his life are more important than his life; in other words, that he is a man. The hypothesis is: let us assume that Christ was a man; but at the bottom of this hypothesis, which is not blasphemy as yet, there lies the assumption that, the consequences of a man's life being more important than his life, this will hold true also of Christ. Unless this is assumed one must admit that one's whole argument is absurd, must admit it before beginning—so why begin at all? But once it is assumed, and the argument is started, we have the blasphemy. And the more one becomes absorbed in the consequences of Christ's life, with the aim of being able to make sure whether or no he was God, the more blasphemous is one's conduct; and it remains blasphemous so long as this consideration is persisted in.

Curious coincidence: one tries to make it appear that, providing one but thoroughly considers the consequences of Christ's life, this "therefore" will surely be arrived at—and faith condemns the very beginning of this attempt as blasphemy, and hence the continuance in it as a worse blasphemy.

"History," says faith, "has nothing to do with Christ." With regard to him we have only Sacred History (which is different in kind from general history), Sacred History which tells of his life and career when in debasement, and tells also that he affirmed himself to be God. He is the paradox which history never will be able to digest or convert into a general syllogism. He is in his debasement the same as he is in his exaltation—but the 1800 years, or let it be 18,000 years, have nothing whatsoever to do with this. The brilliant consequences in the history of the world which are sufficient, almost, to convince even a professor of history that he was God, these brilliant consequences surely do not represent his return in glory! Forsooth, in that case it were imagined rather meanly! The same thing over again: Christ is thought to be a man whose return in glory can be, and can become, nothing else than the consequences of his life in history—whereas Christ's return in glory is something absolutely different and a matter of faith. He abased himself and was swathed in rags—he will return in glory; but the brilliant consequences in history, especially when examined a little more closely, are too shabby a glory—at any rate a glory of an altogether incongruous nature, of which faith therefore never speaks, when speaking about his glory. History is a very

respectable science indeed, only it must not become so conceited as to take upon itself what the Father will do, and clothe Christ in his glory, dressing him up with the brilliant garments of the consequences of his life, as if that constituted his return. That he was God in his debasement and that he will return in glory, all this is far beyond the comprehension of history; nor can all this be got from history, excepting by an incomparable lack of logic, and however incomparable one's view of history may be otherwise.

How strange, then, that one ever wished to use history in order to prove Christ divine.

d.

Are the consequences of Christ's life more important than his life?

No, by no means, but rather the opposite; for else Christ were but a man.

There is really nothing remarkable in a man having lived. There have certainly lived millions upon millions of men. If the fact is remarkable, there must have been something remarkable in a man's life. In other words, there is nothing remarkable in his having lived, but his life was remarkable for this or that. The remarkable thing may, among other matters, also be what he accomplished; that is, the consequences of his life.

But that God lived here on earth in human form, that is infinitely remarkable. No matter if his life had had no consequences at all—it remains equally remarkable, infinitely remarkable, infinitely more remarkable than all possible consequences. Just try to introduce that which is remarkable as something secondary and you will straightway see the absurdity of doing so: now, if you please, whatever remarkable is there in God's life having had remarkable consequences? To speak in this fashion is merely twaddling.

No, that God lived here on earth, that is what is infinitely remarkable, that which is remarkable in itself. Assuming that Christ's life had had no consequences whatsoever—if any one then undertook to say that therefore his life was not remarkable it would be blasphemy. For it would be remarkable all the

same; and if a secondary remarkable characteristic had to be introduced it would consist in the remarkable fact that his life had no consequences. But if one should say that Christ's life was remarkable because of its consequences, then this again were a blasphemy; for it is his life which in itself is the remarkable thing. There is nothing very remarkable in a man's having lived, but it is infinitely remarkable that God has lived. God alone can lay so much emphasis on himself that the fact of his having lived becomes infinitely more important than all the consequences which may flow therefrom and which then become a matter of history.

e.

A comparison between Christ and a man who in his life endured the same treatment by his times as Christ endured.

Let us imagine a man, one of the exalted spirits, one who was wronged by his times, but whom history later reinstated in his rights by proving by the consequences of his life who he was. I do not deny, by the way, that all this business of proving from the consequences is a course well suited to "a world which ever wishes to be deceived." For he who was contemporary with him and did not understand who he was, he really only imagines that he understands when he has got to know it by help of the consequences of the noble one's life. Still, I do not wish to insist on this point, for with regard to a man it certainly holds true that the consequences of his life are more important than the fact of his having lived.

Let us imagine one of these exalted spirits. He lives among his contemporaries without being understood, his significance is not recognized—he is misunderstood, and then mocked, persecuted, and finally put to death like a common evil•doer. But the consequences of his life make it plain who he was; history which keeps a record of these consequences re•instates him in his rightful position, and now he is named in one century after another as the great and the noble spirit, and the circumstances of his debasement are almost completely

forgotten. It was blindness on the part of his contemporaries which prevented them from compre-hending his true nature, and wickedness which made them mock him and deride him, and finally put him to death. But be no more concerned about this; for only after his death did he really become what he was, through the conse-nces of his life which, after all, are by far more im-portant than his life.

Now is it not possible that the same holds true with rega-rd to Christ? It was blindness and wickedness on the part of those times[7]but be no more concerned about this, history has now re•instated him, from history we know now who Jesus Christ was, and thus justice is done him.

Ah, wicked thoughtlessness which thus interprets Sacred istory like profane history, which makes Christ a man! But can one, then, learn anything from history about Jesus? (cf. b) No, nothing. Jesus Christ is the object of faith—one either believes in him or is offended by him; for "to know" means precisely that such knowledge does not pertain to him. History can therefore, to be sure, give one knowledge in abundance; but "knowledge" annihilates Jesus Christ.

Again—ah, the impious thoughtlessness!—for one to presume to say about Christ's abasement: "Let us be concerned o more about his abasement." Surely, Christ's abasement as not something which merely happened to him—even if was the sin of that generation to crucify him; was surely ot something that simply happened to him and, perhaps, would not have happened to him in better times. Christ himself w i s h e d to be abased and lowly. His abasement (that is, his walking on earth in humble guise, though being God) is therefore a condition of his own making, something he wished to be knotted together, a dialectic knot no one shall presume to untie, and which no one will for that matter, until he himself shall untie it when returning in his glory.

His case is, therefore, not the same as that of a man who, through the injustice inflicted on him by his times, was not allowed to be himself or to be valued at his worth, while history revealed who he was; for Christ himself wished to be abased—it is precisely this condition which he desired. Therefore, let history not trouble itself to do him justice, and let us not in impious thoughtlessness presumptuously imagine that we as a matter of course know who he was. For that no one knows; and he who believes it must become contemporaneous with him in

his abasement. When God chooses to let himself be born in lowliness, when he who holds all possibilities in his hand assumes the form of a humble servant, when he fares about defenseless, letting people do with him what they list: he surely knows what he does and why he does it; for it is at all events he who has power over men, and not men who have power over him so let not history be so impertinent as to wish to reveal, who he was.

Lastly—ah the blasphemy!—if one should presume to say that the persecution which Christ suffered expresses something accidental! If a man is persecuted by his generation it does not follow that he has the right to say that this would happen to him in every age. Insofar there is reason in what posterity says about letting bygones be bygones. But it is different with Christ! It is not he who by letting himself be born, and by appearing in Palestine, is being examined by history; but it is he who examines, his life is the examination, not only of that generation, but of m a n k i n d. Woe unto the generation that would presumptuously dare to say: "let bygones be bygones, and forget what he suffered, for history has now revealed who he was and has done justice by him."

If one assumes that history is really able to do this, then the abasement of Christ bears an accidental relation to him; that is to say, he thereby is made a man, an extraordinary man to whom this happened through the wickedness of that generation—a fate which he was far from wishing to suffer, for he would gladly (as is human) have become a great man; whereas Christ voluntarily chose to be the lowly one and, although it was his purpose to save the world, wished also to give expression to what the "truth" suffered then, and must suffer in every generation. But if this is his strongest desire, and if he will show himself in his glory only at his return, and if he has not returned as yet; and if no generation may be without repentance, but on the contra-ry every generation must consider itself a partner in the guilt of that generation: then woe to him who presumes to deprive him of his lowliness, or to cause what he suffered to be forgotten, and to clothe him in the fabled human glory of the historic consequences of his life, which is neither here nor there.

But precisely this is the misfortune, and has been the misfortune, in Christendom that Christ is neither the one nor the other—neither the one he was when living on earth, nor he who will return in glory, but rather one about whom we have learned to know something in an inadmissible way from history—that he was somebody or other of great account. In an inadmissible and unlawful way we have learned to k n o w him; whereas to believe in him is the only permissible mode of approach. Men have mutually confirmed one another in the opinion that the sum total of information about him is available if they but consider the result of his life and the following 1800 years, i.e. the consequences. Gradually, as this became accepted as the truth, all pith and strength was distilled out of Christianity; the paradox was relaxed, one became a Christian without noticing it, without noticing in the least the possibility of being offended by him. One took over Christ's teachings, turned them inside out and smoothed them down—he himself guaranteeing them, of course, the man whose life had had such immense consequences in history! All became plain as day—very naturally, since Christianity in this fashion became heathendom.

There is in Christendom an incessant twaddling on Sundays about the glorious and invaluable truths of Christianity, its mild consolation. But it is indeed evident that Christ lived 1800 years ago; for the rock of offense and object of faith has become a most charming fairy•story character, a kind of divine good old man.[8] People have not the remotest idea of what it means to be offended by him, and still less, what it means to worship. The qualities for which Christ is magnified are precisely those which would have most enraged one, if one had been contemporaneous with him; whereas now one feels altogether secure, placing implicit confidence in the result and, relying altogether on the verdict of history that he was the great man, concludes therefore that it is correct to do so. That is to say, it is the correct, and the noble, and the exalted, and the true, thing—if it is he who does it; which is to say, again, that one does not in any deeper sense take the pains to understand what it is he does, and that one tries even less, to the best of one's ability and with the help of God, to be like him in acting rightly and nobly,

and in an exalted manner, and truthfully. For, not really fathoming it in any deeper sense, one may, in the exigency of a contemporaneous situation, judge him in exactly the opposite way. One is satisfied with admiring and extolling and is, perhaps, as was said of a translator who rendered his original word for word and therefore without making sense, "too conscientious," —one is, perhaps, also too cowardly and too weak to wish to understand his real meaning.
Christendom has done away with Christianity, without being aware of it. Therefore, if anything is to be done about it, the attempt must be made to re •introduce Christianity.

II

He who invites is, then, Jesus Christ in his abasement, it is he who spoke these words of invitation. It is not from his glory that they are spoken. If that were the case, then Christianity were heathendom and the name of Christ taken in vain, and for this reason it cannot be so. But if it were the case that he who is enthroned in glory had said these words: Come hither—as though it were so altogether easy a matter to be clasped in the arms of glory—well, what wonder, then, if crowds of men ran to him! But they who thus throng to him merely go on a wild goose chase, imagining they k n o w who Christ is. But that no one k n o w s; and in order to believe in him one has to begin with his abasement.
He who invites and speaks these words, that is, he whose words they are—whereas the same words if spoken by some one else are, as we have seen, an historic falsification—he is the same lowly Jesus Christ, the humble man, born of a despised maiden, whose father is a carpenter, related to other simple folk of the very lowest class, the lowly man who at the same time (which, to be sure, is like oil poured on the fire) affirms himself to be God.
It is the lowly Jesus Christ who spoke these words. And no word of Christ, not a single one, have you permission to appropriate to yourself, you have not the least share in him, are not in any way of his company, if you have not become his contemporary in lowliness in such fashion that you have become aware, precisely like his contemporaries, of his warning: "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be

offended in me."[9] You have no right to accept Christ's words, and then lie him away; you have no right to accept Christ's words, and then in a fantastic manner, and with the aid of history, utterly change the nature of Christ; for the chatter of history about him is literally not worth a fig.

It is Jesus Christ in his lowliness who is the speaker. It is historically true that he said these words; but so soon as one makes a change in his historic status, it is false to say that these words were spoken by him.

This poor and lowly man, then, with twelve poor fellows as his disciples, all from the lowest class of society, for some time an object of curiosity, but later on in company only with sinners, publicans, lepers, and madmen; for one risked honor, life, and property, or at any rate (and that we know for sure) exclusion from the synagogue, by even letting one's self be helped by him—come hither n o w, all ye that labor and are heavy laden! Ah, my friend, even if you were deaf and blind and lame and leprous, if you, which has never been seen or heard before, united all human miseries in your misery—and if he wished to help you by a miracle: it is possible that (as is human) you would fear more than all your sufferings the punishment which was set on accepting aid from him, the punishment of being cast out from the society of other men, of being ridiculed and mocked, day after day, and perhaps of losing your life. It is human (and it is characteristic of being human) were you to think as follows: "no, thank you, in that case I prefer to remain deaf and blind and lame and leprous, rather than accept aid under such conditions."

"Come hither, come hither, all, ye that labor and are heavy laden, ah, come hither," lo! he invites you and opens his arms. Ah, when a gentlemanly man clad in a silken gown says this in a pleasant, harmonious voice so that the words pleasantly resound in the handsome vaulted church, a man in silk who radiates honor and respect on all who listen to him; ah, when a king in purple and velvet says this, with the Christmas tree in the background on which are hanging all the splendid gifts he intends to distribute, why, then of course there is some meaning in these words! But whatever meaning you may attach to them, so much is sure that it is not Christianity, but the exact opposite, something as diametrically opposed to Christianity as may well be; for remember who it is that invites!

And now judge for yourself—for that you have a right to do; whereas men

really do not have a right to do what is so often done, viz. to deceive themselves. That a man of such appearance, a man whose company every one shuns who has the least bit of sense in his head, or the least bit to lose in the world, that he—well, this is the absurdest and maddest thing of all, one hardly knows whether to laugh or to weep about it—that he—indeed, that is the very last word one would expect to issue from his mouth, for if he had said: "Come hither and help me," or: "Leave me alone," or: "Spare me," or proudly: "I despise you all," we could understand that perfectly—but that such a man says: "Come hither to me!" why, I declare, that looks inviting indeed! And still further: "All ye that labor and are heavy laden"—as though such folk were not burdened enough with troubles, as though they now, to cap all, should be exposed to the consequences of associating with him. And then, finally: "I shall give you rest." What's that?—h e help them? Ah, I am sure even the most good•natured joker who was contemporary with him would have to say: "Surely, that was the thing he should have undertaken last of all—to wish to help others, being in that condition himself ! Why, it is about the same as if a beggar were to inform the police that he had been robbed. For it is a contradiction that one who has nothing, and has had nothing, informs us that he has been robbed; and likewise, to wish to help others when one's self needs help most." Indeed it is, humanly speaking, the most harebrained contradiction, that he who literally "hath not where to lay his head," that he about whom it was spoken truly, in a human sense, "Behold the man!"—that he should say: "Come hither unto me all ye that suffer—I shall help!"

Now examine yourself—for that you have a right to do, You have a right to examine yourself, but you really do not have a right to let yourself without self •examination be deluded by "the others" into the belief, or to delude yourself into the belief, that you are a Christian—therefore examine yourself: supposing you were contemporary with him! True enough he—alas! he affirmed himself to be God! But many another madman has made that claim—and his times gave it as their opinion that he uttered blasphemy. Why, was not that precisely the reason why a punishment was threatened for allowing one's self to be aided by him? It was the godly care for their souls entertained by the existing order and by public opinion, lest any one should be led astray: it was this godly care that led them to

persecute him in this fashion. Therefore, before any one resolves to be helped by him, let him consider that he must not only expect the antagonism of men, but—consider it well!—even if you could bear the consequences of that step—but consider well, that the punishment meted out by men is supposed to be God's punishment of him, "the blasphemer"—of him who invites!

Come hither n o w all ye that labor and are heavy laden!

How now? Surely this is nothing to run after—some little pause is given, which is most fittingly used to go around about by way of another street. And even if you should not thus sneak out in some way—always providing you feel yourself to be contemporary with him—or sneak into being some kind of Christian by belonging to Christendom: yet there will be a tremendous pause given, the pause which is the very condition that faith may arise: you are given pause by the possibility of being offended in him.

But in order to make it entirely clear, and bring it home to our minds, that the pause is given by him who invites, that it is he who gives us pause and renders it by no means an easy, but a peculiarly difficult, matter to follow his invitation, because one has no right to accept it without accepting also him who invites—in order to make this entirely clear I shall briefly review his life under two aspects which, to be sure, show some difference though both e s s e n t i a l l y pertain to his abasement. For it is always an abasement for God to become man, even if he were to be an emperor of emperors; and therefore he is not e s s e n t i a l l y more abased because he is a poor, lowly man, mocked, and as Scripture adds,[10] spat upon.

THE FIRST PHASE OF HIS LIFE

And now let us speak about him in a homely fashion, just as his contemporaries spoke about him, and as one speaks about some contemporary—let him be a man of the same kind as we are, whom one meets on the street in passing, of whom one knows where he lives and in what story, what his business is, who his parents are, his family, how he looks and how he dresses, with whom he associates, "and there is nothing extraordinary about him, he looks as men generally look"; in

short, let us speak of him as one speaks of some contemporary about whom one does not make a great ado; for in living life together with these thousands upon thousands of r e a l people there is no room for a fine distinction like this: "Possibly, this man will be remembered in centuries to come," and "at the same time he is r e a l l y only a clerk in some shop who is no whit better than his fellows." Therefore, let us speak about him as contemporaries speak about some contemporary. I know very well what I am doing; and I want you to believe that the canting and indolent world•historic habit we have of always reverently speaking about Christ (since one has learned all about it from history, and has heard so much about his having been something very extraordinary, indeed, or something of that kind)—that reverent habit, I assure you, is not worth row of pins but is, rather, sheer thoughtlessness, hypocrisy, and as such blasphemy; for it is blasphemy to reverence thoughtlessly him whom one is either to believe in or to be offended in.

It is the lowly Jesus Christ, a humble man, born of a maiden of low degree, whose father is a carpenter. To be sure, his appearance is made under conditions which are bound to attract attention to him. The small nation among whom he appears, God's Chosen People as they call themselves, live in anticipation of a Messiah who is to bring a golden period to land and people. You must grant that one form in which he appears is as different as possible from what most people would have expected. On the other hand, his appearance corresponds more to the ancient prophecies with which the people are thought to have been familiar. Thus he presents himself. A predecessor has called attention to him, and he himself fastens attention very decidedly on himself by signs and wonders which are noised abroad in all the land—and he is the hero of the hour, surrounded by unnumbered multitudes of people wheresoever he fares. The sensation aroused by him is enormous, every one's eyes are fastened on him, every one who can go about, aye even those who can only crawl, must see the wonder—and every one must have some opinion about him, so that the purveyors of ready•made opinions are put to it because the demand is so furious and the contradictions so confusing. And yet he, the worker of miracles, ever remains the humble man who literally hath not where to lay his head.

And let us not forget: signs and wonders as contemporary events have a markedly

greater elasticity in repelling or attracting than the tame stories generally re•hashed by the priests, or the still tamer stories about signs and wonders that happened—1800 years ago! Signs and wonders as contemporary events are something plaguy and importunate, something which in a highly embarrassing manner almost compels one to have an opinion, something which, if one does not happen to be disposed to believe, may exasperate one excessively by thus forcing one to be contemporaneous with it. Indeed, it renders existence too complicated, and the more so, the more thoughtful, developed, and cultured one is. It is a peculiarly ticklish matter, this having to assume that a man who is contemporaneous with one really performs signs and wonders; but when he is at some distance from one, when the consequences of his life stimulate the imagination a bit, then it is not so hard to imagine, in a fashion, that one believes it.

As I said, then, the people are carried away with him; they follow him jubilantly, and see signs and wonders, both those which he performs and those which he does not perform, and they are glad in their hope that the golden age will begin, once he is king. But the crowd rarely have a clear reason for their opinions, they think one thing today and another tomorrow. Therefore the wise and the critical will not at once participate. Let us see now what the wise and the critical must think, so soon as the first impression of astonishment and surprise has subsided.

The shrewd and critical man would probably say: "Even assuming that this person is what he claims to be, that is, something extraordinary—for as to his affirming himself to be God I can, of course, not consider that as anything but an exaggeration for which I willingly make allowances, and pardon him, if I really considered him to be something extraordinary; for I am not a pedant—assuming then, which I hesitate to do, for it is a matter on which I shall at any rate suspend my judgment—assuming then that he is really performing miracles: is it not an inexplicable mystery that this person can be so foolish, so weak•minded, so altogether devoid of worldly wisdom, so feeble, or so good•naturedly vain, or whatever else you please to call it—that he behaves in this fashion and almost forces his benefactions on men? Instead of proudly and commandingly keeping people away from himself at a distance marked by their profoundest submission, whenever he does allow himself to be seen, at rare occasions: instead of doing so,

think of his being accessible to every one, or rather himself going to every one, of having intercourse with everybody, almost as if being the extraordinary person consisted in his being everybody's servant,[11] as if the extraordinary person he claims to be were marked by his being concerned only lest men should fail to be benefited by him—in short as if being an extraordinary person consisted in being the most solicitous of all persons. The whole business is inexplicable to me—what he wants, what his purpose is, what end he has in mind, what he expects to accomplish; in a word, what the meaning of it all is. He who by so many a wise saying reveals so profound an insight into the human heart, he must certainly know what I, using but half of my wits, can predict for him, viz. that in such fashion one gets nowhere in the world—unless, indeed, despising prudence, one consistently aims to make a fool of one's self or, perchance, goes so far in sincerity as to prefer being put to death; but anyone desiring that must certainly be crazy. Having such profound knowledge of the human heart he certainly ought to know that the thing to do is to deceive people and then to give one's deception the appearance of being a benefaction conferred on the whole race. By doing so one reaps all advantages, even the one whose enjoyment is the sweetest of all, which is, to be called by one's contemporaries a benefactor of the human race—for, once in your grave, you may snap your fingers at what posterity may have to say about you. But to surrender one's self altogether, as he does, and not to think the least of one's self—in fact, almost to beg people to accept these benefactions: no, I would not dream of joining his company. And, of course, neither does he invite me; for, indeed, he invites only them that labor and are heavy laden."

Or he would reason as follows: "His life is simply a fantastic dream. In fact, that is the mildest expression one can use about it; for, when judging him in this fashion, one is good•natured enough to forget altogether the evidence of sheer madness in his claim to be God. This is wildly fantastical. One may possibly live a few years of one's youth in such fashion. But he is now past thirty years. And he is literally nothing. Still further, in a very short time he will necessarily lose all the respect and reputation he has gained among the people, the only thing, you may say, he has gained for himself. One who wishes to keep in the good graces of the people—the riskiest chance imaginable, I will admit—he must act

differently. Not many months will pass before the crowd will grow tired of one who is so altogether at their service. He will be regarded as a ruined person, a kind of outcast, who ought to be glad to end his days in a corner, the world forgetting, by the world forgot; providing he does not, by continuing his previous behavior, prefer to maintain his present attitude and be fantastic enough to wish to be put to death, which is the unavoidable consequence of persevering in that course. What has he done for his future? Nothing. Has he any assured position? No. What expectations has he? None. Even this trifling matter: what will he do to pass the time when he grows older, the long winter nights, what will he do to make them pass—why, he cannot even play cards! He is now enjoying a bit of popular favor—in truth, of all movable property the most movable—which in a trice may turn into an enormous popular hatred of him.—Join his company? No, thank you, I am still, thank God, in my right mind.

Or he may reason as follows: "That there is something exrtaordinary about this person—even if one reserves the right, both one's own and that of common sense, to refrain from venturing any opinion as to his claim of being God—about that there is really little doubt. Rather, one might be indignant at Providence's having entrusted such a person with these powers—a person who does the very opposite what he himself bids us do: that we shall not cast our pearls before the swine; for which reason he will, as he himself predicts, come to grief by their turning about and trampling him under their feet. One may always expect this of swine; but, on the other hand, one would not expect that he who had himself called attention to this likelihood, himself would do precisely[12] what he knows one should not do. If only there were some means of cleverly stealing his wisdom—for I shall gladly leave him in indisputed possession of that very peculiar thought of his that he is God—if one could but rob his wisdom without, at the same time, becoming his disciple! If one could only steal up to him at night and lure it from him; for I am more than equal to editing and publishing it, and better than he, if you please. I undertake to astonish the whole world by getting something altogether different out of it; for I clearly see there is something wondrously profound in what he says, and the misfortune is only that he is the man he is. But perhaps, who knows, perhaps it is feasible, anyway, to fool him out of it. Perhaps in that respect too he is good—natured and simple enough to communicate it quite freely to me. It is

not impossible; for it seems to me that the wisdom he unquestionably possesses, evidently has been entrusted to a fool, seeing there is so much contradiction in his life.—But as to joining his company and becoming his disciple—no indeed, that would be the same as becoming a fool oneself."

Or he might reason as follows: "If this person does indeed mean to further what is good and true (I do not venture to decide this), he is helpful at least, in this respect, to Youths and inexperienced people. For they will be benefited, in this serious life of ours, by learning, the sooner the better, and very thoroughly—he opens the eyes even of the blindest to this—that all this pretense of wishing to live only for goodness and truth contains a considerable admixture of the ridiculous. He proves how right the poets of our times are when they let truth and goodness be represented by some half•witted fellow, one who is so stupid that you can knock down a wall with him. The idea of exerting one's self, as this man does, of renouncing everything but pains and trouble, to be at beck and call all day long, more eager than the busiest family physician—and pray why? Because he makes a living by it? No, not in the very least; it has never occurred to him, as far as I can see, to want somethg in in return. Does he earn any money by it? No, not a red cent—he has not a red cent to his name, and if he did he would forthwith give it away. Does he, then, aspire to a position of honor and dignity in the state? On the contrary, he loathes all worldly honor. And he who, as I said, condemns all worldly honor, and practices the art of living on nothing; he who, if any one, seems best fitted to pass his life in a most comfortable *dolce far niente*—which is not such a bad thing—: he lives under a greater strain than any government official who is rewarded by honor and dignity, lives under a greater strain than any business man who earns money like sand. Why does he exert himself thus, or (why this question about a matter not open to question ?) why should any one exert himself thus—in order to attain to the happiness of being ridiculed, mocked, and so forth? To be sure, a peculiar kind of pleasure! That one should push one's way through a crowd to reach the spot where money, honor, and glory are distributed—why, that is perfectly understandable; but to push forward to be whipped: how exalted, how Christian, how stupid!"

Or he will reason as follows: "One hears so many rash opinions about this person from people who understand nothing—and worship him; and so many

severe condemnations of him by those who, perhaps, misunderstand him after all. As for me, I am not going to allow myself to be accused of venturing a hasty opinion. I shall keep entirely cool and calm; in fact, which counts for still more, I am conscious of being as reasonable and moderate with him as is possible. Grant now—which, to be sure, I do only to a certain extent—grant even that one's reason is impressed by this person. What, then, is my opinion about him? My opinion is, that for the present, I can form no opinion about him. I do not mean about his claim of being God; for about that I can never in all eternity have an opinion. No, I mean about him as a man. Only by the consequences of his life shall we be able to decide whether he was an extraordinary person or whether, deceived by his imagination, he applied too high a standard, not only to himself, but also to humanity in general. More I cannot do for him, try as I may—if he were my only friend, my own child, I could not judge him more leniently, nor differently, either. It follows from this, to be sure, that in all probability, and for good reasons, I shall not ever be able to have any opinion about him. For in order to be able to form an opinion I must first see the consequences of his life, including his very last moments; that is, he must be dead then, and perhaps not even then, may I form an opinion of him. And, even granting this, it is not really an opinion about him, for he is then no more. No more is needed to say why it is impossible for me to join him while he is living. The a u t h o r i t y he is said to show in his teaching can have no decisive influence in my case; for it is surely easy to see that his thought moves in a circle. He quotes as authority that which he is to prove, which in its turn can be proved only by the consequences of his life; provided, of course, it is not connected with that fixed idea of his about being God, because if it is t h e r e f o r e he has this authority (because he is God) the answer must be: yes—if! So much, however, I may admit, that if I could imagine myself living in some later age, and if the consequences of his life as shown in history had made it plain that he was the extraordinary person he in a former age claimed to be, then it might very well be—in fact, I might come very near, becoming his disciple."

An ecclesiastic would reason as follows: "For an impostor and demagogue he has, to say the truth, a remarkable air of honesty about him; for which reason he cannot be so absolutely dangerous, either, even though the situation looks

dangerous enough while the squall is at its height, and ever, though the situation looks dangerous enough with his enormous popularity—until the squall has passed over and the people—yes, precisely the people—overthrow him again. The honest thing about him is his claim to be the Messiah when he resembles him so little as he does. That is honest, just as if some one in preparing bogus paper-money made the bills so poorly that every one who knows the least about it cannot fail to detect the fraud.—True enough, we all look forward to a Messiah, but surely no one with any sense expects God himself to come, and every religious person shudders at the blasphemous attitude of this person. We look forward to a Messiah, we are all agreed on that. But the governance of the world does not go forward tumultuously, by leaps and bounds; the development of the world, as is indicated by the very fact that it is a development, proceeds by evolution, not by revolution. The true Messiah will therefore look quite different, and will arrive as the most glorious flower, and the highest development, of that which already exists. Thus will the true Messiah come, and he will proceed in an entirely different fashion: he will recognize the existing order as the basis of things, he will summon all the clergy to council and present to them the results accomplished by him, as well as his credentials—and then, if he obtain the majority of the votes when the ballot is cast, he will be received and saluted as the extraordinary person, as the one he is: the Messiah.[13]

"However, there is a duplicity in this man's behavior; he assumes too much the rôle of judge. It seems as if he wished to be, at one and the same time, both the judge who passes sentence on the existing order of things, and the Messiah. If he does not wish to play the rôle of the judge, then why his absolute isolation, his keeping at a distance from all which has to do with the existing order of things? And if he does not wish to be the judge, then why his fantastic flight from reality to join the ignorant crowd, then why with the haughtiness of a revolutionary does he despise all the intelligence and efficiency to be found in the existing order of things? And why does he begin afresh altogether, and absolutely from the bottom up, by the help of—fishermen and artisans? May not the fact that he is an illegitimate child fitly characterize his entire relation to the existing order of things? On the other hand, if he wishes to be only the Messiah, why then his warning about putting a piece of new cloth unto an old garment.[14] For these

words are precisely the watchwords of every revolution since they are expressive of a person's discontent with the existing order and of his wish to destroy it. That is, these words reveal his desire to remove existing conditions, rather than to build on them and better them, if one is a reformer, or to develop them to their highest possibility, if one is indeed the Messiah. This is duplicity. In fact, it is not feasible to be both judge and Messiah. Such duplicity will surely result in his downfall.[15] The climax in the life of a judge is his death by violence, and so the poet pictures it correctly; but the climax in the life of the Messiah cannot possibly be his death. Or else, by that very fact, he would not be the Messiah, that is, he whom the existing order expects in order to deify him. This duplicity has not as yet been recognized by the people, who see in him their Messiah; but the existing order of things cannot by any manner of means recognize him as such. The people, the idle and loafing crowd, can do so only because they represent nothing less than the existing order of things. But as soon as the duplicity becomes evident to them, his doom is sealed. Why, in this respect his predecessor was a far more definitely marked personality, for he was but one thing, the judge. But what confusion and thoughtlessness, to wish to be both, and what still worse confusion, to acknowledge his predecessor as the judge—that is, in other words, precisely to make the existing order of things receptive and ripe for the Messiah who is to come after the judge, and yet not wish to associate himself with the existing order of things!"

And the philosopher would reason as follows: "Such dreadful or, rather, insane vanity, that a single individual claims to be God, is a thing hitherto unheard of. Never before have we been witness to such an excess of pure subjectivity and sheer negation. He has no doctrines, no system of philosophy, he knows really nothing, he simply keeps on repeating, and making variations on, some unconnected aphoristic sentences, some few maxims, and a couple of parables by which he dazzles the crowd for whom he also performs signs and wonders; so that they, instead of learning something, or being improved, come to believe in one who in a most brazen way constantly forces his subjective views on us. There is nothing objective or positive whatever in him and in what he says. Indeed, from a philosophical point of view, he does not need to fear destruction for he has perished already, since it is inherent in the nature of subjectivity to perish. One

may in all fairness admit that his subjectivity is remarkable and that, be it as it may with the other miracles, he constantly repeats his miracle with the five small loaves,[16] viz., by means of a few lyric utterances and some aphorisms he rouses the whole country. But even if one were inclined to overlook his insane notion of affirming himself to be God, it is an incomprehensible mistake, which, to be sure, demonstrates a lack of philosophic training, to believe that God could reveal himself in the form of an individual. The race, the universal, the total, is God; but the race surely is not an individual! Generally speaking, that is the impudent assumption of subjectivity, which claims that the individual is something extraordinary. But sheer insanity is shown in the claim of an individual to be God. Because if the insane thing were possible, viz. that an individual might be God, why, then this individual would have to be worshipped, and a more beastly philosophic stupidity is not conceivable."

The astute statesman would reason as follows: "That at present this person wields great power is undeniable—entirely disregarding, of course, this notion of his that he is God. Foibles like these, being idiosyncrasies, do not count against a man and concern no one, least of all a statesman. A statesman is concerned only with what power a man wields; and that he does wield great power cannot, as I have remarked, be denied. But what he intends to do, what his aim is, I cannot make out at all. If this be calculation it must be of an entirely new and peculiar order, not so altogether unlike what is otherwise called madness. He possesses points of considerable strength; but he seems to defeat, rather than to use, it; he expends it without h i m s e l f getting any returns. I consider him a phenomenon with which—as ought to be one's rule with all phenomena—a wise man should not have anything to do, since it is impossible to calculate him or the catastrophe threatening his life. It is possible that he will be made king. It is possible, I say; but it is not impossible, or rather, it is just as possible, that he may end on the gallows. He lacks earnestness in all his endeavors. With all his enormous stretch of wings he only hovers and gets nowhere. He does not seem to have any definite plan of procedure, but just hovers. Is it for his nationality he is fighting, or does he aim at a communistic revolution? Does he wish to establish a republic or a kingdom? With which party does he affiliate himself to combat which party, or does he wish to fight all parties ?

"I have anything to do with him?—No, that would be the very last thing to enter my mind. In fact, I take all possible precautions to avoid him. I keep quiet, undertake nothing, act as if I did not exist; for one cannot even calculate how he might interfere with one's undertakings, be they
ever so unimportant, or at any rate, how one might become involved in the vortex of his activities. Dangerous, in a certain sense enormously dangerous, is this man. But I calculate that I may ensnare him precisely by doing nothing. For overthrown he must be. And this is done most safely by letting him do it himself, by letting him stumble over himself. I have, at least at this moment, not sufficient power to bring about his fall; in fact, I know no one who has. To undertake the least thing against him now, means to be crushed one's self. No, my plan is constantly to exert only negative resistance to him, that is, to do nothing, and he will probably involve himself in the enormous consequences he draws after him, till in the end he will tread on his own train, as it were, and thus fall."

And the steady citizen would reason as follows (which would then become the opinion of his family) : "Now, let us be human, everything is good when done in moderation, too little and too much spoil everything, and as a French saying has it which I once heard a traveling salesman use: every power which exceeds itself comes to a fall—and as to this person, his fall is certainly sure enough. I have earnestly spoken to my son and warned and admonished him not to drift into evil ways and join that person. And why? Because all people are running after him. That is to say, what sort of people? Idlers and loafers, street•walkers and tramps, who run after everything. But mightly few of the men who have house and property, and nobody who is wise and respected, none after whom I set my clock, neither councillor Johnson, nor senator Anderson, nor the wealthy broker Nelson—oh no! they know what's what. And as to the ministry who ought to know most about such matters—ah, they will have none of him. What was it pastor Green said in the club the other evening? 'That man will yet come to a terrible end,' he said. And Green, he can do more than preach, you oughtn't to hear him Sundays in church so much as Mondays in the club—I just wished I had half his knowledge of affairs! He said quite correctly, and as if spoken out of my own heart: 'Only idlers and loafers are running after that man.' And why do they run after him? Because he performs some miracles. But who is sure they are

miracles, or that he can confer the same power on his disciples? And, in any case, a miracle is somethng mightly uncertain, whereas the certain is the certain. Every serious father who has grown•up children must be truly alarmed lest his sons be seduced and join that man together with the desperate characters who follow him—desperate characters who have nothing to lose. And even these, how does he help them? Why, one must be mad to wish to be helped in this fashion. Even the poorest beggar is brought to a worse estate than his former one, is brought to a pass he could have escaped by remaining what he was, that is, a beggar and no more."

And the mocker, not the one hated on account of his malice, but the one who is admired for his wit and liked for his good nature, he would reason as follows: "It is, after all, a rich idea which is going to prove useful to all of us, that an individual who is in no wise different from us claims to be God. If that is not being a benefactor of the race then I don't know what charity and beneficence are. If we assume that the characteristic of being God—well, who in all the world would have hit on that idea? How true that such an idea could not have entered into the heart of man[17]—but if we assume that it consists in looking in no wise different from the rest of us, and in nothing else: why, then we are all gods. Q. E. D. Three cheers for him, the inventor of a discovery so extraordinarily important for mankind! Tomorrow I, the undersigned, shall proclaim that I am God, and the discoverer at least will not be able to contradict me without contradicting himself. At night all cats are gray; and if to be God consists in looking like the rest of us, absolutely and altogether like the rest of mankind: why, then it is night and we all are . . ., or what is it I wanted to say: we all are God, every one of us, and no one has a right to say he isn't as well off as his neighbor. This is the most ridiculous situation imaginable, the contradiction here being the greatest, imaginable, and a contradiction always making for a comical effect. But this is in no wise my discovery, but solely that of the discoverer: this idea that a man of exactly the same appearance as the rest of us, only not half so well dressed as the average man, that is, a poorly dressed person who, rather than being God, seems to invite the attention of the society for the relief of the poor—that he is God! I am only sorry for the director of the charitable society that he will not get a raise from this general advancement of the human race but that he will, rather, lose his job on

account of this, etc."

Ah, my friend, I know well what I am doing, I know my responsibility, and my soul is altogether assured of the correctness of my procedure. Now then, imagine yourself a contemporary of him who invites. Imagine yourself to be a sufferer, but consider well to what you expose yourself in becoming his disciple and following him. You expose yourself to losing practically everything in the eyes of all wise and sensible and respected men. He who invites demands of you that you surrender all, give up everything; but the common sense of your own times and of your contemporaries will not give you up, but will judge that to join him is madness. And mockery will descend cruelly upon you; for while it will almost spare him, out of compassion, you will be thought madder than a march•hare for becoming his disciple. People will say: "That h e is a wrong•headed enthusiast, that can't be helped. Well and good; but to become—in all seriousness—his disciple, that is the greatest piece of madness imaginable. There surely is but one possibility of being madder than a madman, which is the higher madness of joining a madman in all seriousness and regarding him as a sage."

Do not say that the whole presentation above is exaggerated. Ah, you know (but, possibly, have not fully realized it) that among all the respectable men, among all the enlightened and sensible men, there was but one—though it is easily possible that one or the other of them, impelled by curiosity, entered into conversation with him—that there was but one among them who sought him in all seriousness.[18] And he came to him—in the night! And as you know, in the night one walks on forbidden paths, one chooses the night to go to places of which one does not like to be known as a frequenter. Consider the opinion of the inviter implid in this—it was a disgrace to visit him, something no man of honor could afford to do, as little as to pay a nightly visit to—but no, I do not care to say in so many words what would follow this "as little as."

Come hither to me now all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

THE SECOND PHASE OF HIS LIFE

His end was what all the wise and the sensible, the statesmen and the citizens and the mockers, etc., predicted it would be. And as was later spoken to him, in a moment when, it would seem, the most hardened ought to have been moved to sympathy, and the very stones to tears: "He saved others; let him save himself,"[19] and as it has been repeated thousands upon thousands of times, by thousands upon thousands: "What was it he spoke of before, saying his hour was not yet come[20]—is it come now, perchance?"—It has been repeated, alas, the while the single individual, the believer, shudders whenever considering—while yet unable to refrain from gazing into the depth of what to men is a meaningless absurdity—shudders when considering that God in human guise, that his divine teaching, that these signs and wonders which might have made a very Sodom and Gomorrha reform its ways, in reality produced the exact opposite, and caused the teacher to be shunned, hated, despised.

Who he is, one can recognize more easily now when the powerful ones and the respected ones, and all the precautionary measures of those upholding the existing order, have corrected any wrong conception one might have entertained about him at first—now when the people have lost their patience to wait for a Messiah, seeing that his life, instead of rising in dignity, lapsed into ever greater degradation. Who, pray, does not recognize that a man is judged according to the society in which he moves—and now, think of his society! Indeed, his society one might well designate as equivalent to being expelled from "human society"; for his society are the lowest classes of the people, with sinners and publicans among them, people whom everybody with the slightest self•respect shuns for the sake of his good name and reputation—and a good name and reputation surely are about the least one can wish to preserve. In his company there are, furthermore, lepers whom every one flees, madmen who can only inspire terror, invalids and wretches—squalor and misery. Who, then, is this person that, though followed by such a company, still is the object of the persecution of the mighty ones? He is one despised as a seducer of men, an impostor, a blasphemer! And if any one enjoying a good reputation refrains from expressing contempt of him, it is really only a kind of compassion; for to fear him is, to be sure, something different.

Such, then, is his appearance; for take care not to be influenced by anything that

you may have learned after the event—as, how his exalted spirit, with an almost divine majesty, never was so markedly manifest as just them. Ah, my friend, if you were the contemporary of one who is not only himself "excluded from the synagogue" but, as you will remember, whose very help meant being "excluded from the synagogue"—I say, if you were the contemporary of an outcast, who in every respect answers to that term, (for everything has two sides) : then you will scarcely be the man to explain all this in terms directly contrary to appearances;[21] or, which is the same thing, you will not be the "single individual" which, as you well know, no one wants to be, and to be which is regarded as a ridiculous oddity, perhaps even as a crime.

And now—for they are his society chiefly—as to his apostles! What absurdity; though not—what new absurdity, for it is quite in keeping with the rest—his apostles are some fishermen, ignorant people who but the other day followed their trade. And tomorrow, to pile one absurdity on the other, they are to go out into the wide world and transform its aspect. And it is he who claims to be God, and these are his duly appointed apostles! Now, is he to make his apostles respected, or are perhaps the apostles to make him respected? Is he, the inviter, is he an absurd dreamer? Indeed, his procession would make it seem so; no poet -could have hit on a better idea. A teacher, a sage, or whatever you please to call him, a kind of stranded genius, who affirms himself to be God—surrounded by a jubilant mob, himself accompanied by some publicans, criminals, and lepers; nearest to him a chosen few, his apostles. And these judges so excellently competent as to what truth is, these fishermen, tailors, and shoe•makers, they do not only admire him, their teacher and master, whose every word is wisdom and truth; they do not only see what no one else can see, his exaltedness and holiness, nay, but they see God in him and worship him. Certainly, no poet could invent a better situation, and it is doubtful if the poet would not forget the additional item that this same person is feared by the mighty ones and that they are scheming to destroy him. His death alone can reassure and satisfy them. They have set an ignominious punishment on joining his company, on merely accepting aid from him; and yet they do not feel secure, and cannot feel altogether reassured that the whole thing is mere wrongheaded enthusiasm and absurdity. Thus the mighty ones. The populace who had idolized him, the populace have pretty nearly given

him up, only in moments does their old conception of him blaze forth again. In all his existence there is not a shred the most envious of the envious might envy him to have. Nor do the mighty ones envy his life. They demand his death for safety's sake, so that they may have peace again, when all has returned to the accustomed ways, peace having been made still more secure by the warning example of his death.

These are the two phases of his life. It began with the people's idolizing him, whereas all who were identified with the existing order of things, all who had power and influence, vengefully, but in a cowardly and hidden manner, laid their snares for him—in which he was caught, then? Yes, but he perceived it well. Finally the people discover that they had been deceived in him, that the fulfilment he would bring them answered least of all to their expectations of wonders and mountains of gold. So the people deserted him and the mighty ones drew the snare about him—in which he was caught, then? Yes, but he perceived it well. The mighty ones drew the snare together about him—and thereupon the people, who then saw themselves completely deceived, turned against him in hatred and rage.

And—to include that too—compassion would say; or, among the compassionate one—for compassion is sociable, and likes to assemble together, and you will find spitefulness and envy keeping company with whining soft•headedness: since, as a heathen philosopher observed long ago, no one is so ready to sympathize as an envious person—among the compassionate ones the verdict would be: it is really too bad that this good•hearted fellow is to come to such an end. For he was really a good sort of fellow. Granting it was an exaggeration to claim to be God, he really was good to the poor and the needy, even if in an odd manner, by becoming one of them and going about in the company of beggars. But there is something touching in it all, and one can't help but feel sorry for the poor fellow who is to suffer such a miserable death. For you may say what you will, and condemn him as strongly as you will, I cannot help feeling pity for him. I am not so heard•hearted as not to feel compassion."

We have arrived at the last phase, not of Sacred History, as handed down by the

apostles and disciples who believed in Christ, but of profane history, its counterpart.

Come hither now, all ye that labor and are heavy laden: that is, if you feel the need, even if vou are of all sufferers the most miserable—if you feel the need of being helped in this fashion, that is, to fall into still greater suffering, then come hither, he will help you.

III

THE INVITATION AND THE INVITER

Let us forget for a little while what, in the strictest sense, constitutes the "offense"; which is, that the inviter claims to be God. Let us assume that he did not claim to be more than a man, and let us then consider the inviter and his invitation.

The invitation is surely inviting enough. How, then, shall one explain the bad relation which did exist, this terribly wrong relation, that no one, or practically no one, accepted the invitation; that, on the contrary, all, or practically all—alas! and was it not precisely all who were invited?—that practically all were at one in offering resistance to the inviter, in wishing to put him to death, and in setting a punishment on accepting aid from him? Should one not expect that after an invitation such as he issued all, all who suffered, would come crowding to him, and that all they who were not suffering would crowd to him, touched by the thought of such compassion and mercy, and that thus the whole race would be at one in admiring and extolling the inviter? How is the opposite to be explained? For that this was the outcome is certain enough; and the fact that it all happened in those remote times is surely no proof that the generation then living was worse than other generations! How could any one be so thoughtless as to believe that? For whoever gives any thought to the matter will easily see that it happened in that generation only because they chanced to be contemporaneous with him. How then explain that it happened—that all came to that terribly wrong end, so

opposite to what ought to have been expected?

Well, in the first place, if the inviter had looked the figure which purely human compassion would have him be; and, in the second place, if he had entertained the purely human conception of what constitutes man's misery—why, then it would probably not have happened.

I n t h e f i r s t p l a c e: According to this human conception of him he should have been a most generous and sympathetic person, and at the same time possessed of all qualifications requisite for being able to help in all troubles of this world, ennobling the help thus extended by a profound and heartfelt human compassion. Withal (so they would imagine him) he should also have been a man of some distinction and not without a certain amount of human self •assertion—the consequence of which would be, however, that he would neither have been able, in his compassion, to reach down to all sufferers, nor yet to have comprehended, fully what constitutes the misery of man and of mankind.

But divine compassion, the infinite u n c o n c e r n which takes thought only of those that suffer, and not in the least of one's self, and which with absolute unconcern takes thought of all that suffer: that will always seem to men only a kind of madness, and they will ever be puzzled whether to laugh or to weep about it. Even if nothing else had militated against the inviter, this alone would have beer sufficient to make his lot hard in the world.

Let a man but try a little while to practice divine compassion, that is, to be somewhat unconcerned in his compassion., and you will at once perceive what the opinion of mankind would be. For example: let one who could occupy some higher rank in society, let him not (preserving all the while the distinction of his position) lavishly give to the poor, and philanthropically (i.e. in a superior fashion) visit the poor and the sick and the wretched—no, let him give up altogether the distinction of his position and in all earnest choose the company of the poor and the lowly, let him live altogether with the people, with workmen, hodmen, mortarmixers, and the like! Ah, in a quiet moment, when not actually b e h o l d i n g him, most of us will be moved to tears by the mere thought of it; but no sooner would they s e e him in this company—him who might have attained to honor and dignity in the world—see him walking along in such goodly company, with a bricklayer's apprentice on his right side and a cobbler's boy on

his left, but—well, what then? First they would devise a thousand explanations to explain that it is because of queer notions, or obstinacy, or pride, or vanity that he chooses this mode of life. And even if they would refrain from attributing to him these evil motives they will never be reconciled with the sight of him—in this company. The noblest person in the world will be tempted to laugh, the moment he s e e s it.

And if all the clergymen in the world, whether in velvet or in silk or in broadcloth or in satin, contradicted me I would say: "You lie, you only deceive people with your Sunday sermons. Because it will always be possible for a contemporary to say about one so compassionate (who, it is to be kept in mind, is our contemporary): "I believe he is actuated by vanity, and that is why I laugh and mock at him; but if he were truly compassionate, or had I been contemporary with him, the noble one—why then!" And now, as to those exalted ones "who were not understood by men"—to speak in the fashion of the usual run of sermons—why, sure enough, they are dead. In this fashion these people succeed in playing hide and seek. You simply assume that every contemporary who ventures out so far is actuated only by vanity; and as to the departed, you assume that they are dead and that they, therefore, were among the glorious ones.

It must be remembered, to be sure, that every person, wishes to maintain his own level in life, and this fixed point, this steady endeavor, is one of the causes which limit h u m a n compassion to a certain sphere. The cheesemonger will think that to live like the inmate of a poorhouse is going too far in expressing one's sympathy; for the sympathy of the cheese•monger is biased in one regard which is, his regard of the opinion of other cheese•mongers and of the saloon •keepers. His compassion is therefore not without its limitations. And thus with every class—and the journalists, living as they do on the pennies of the poor, under the pretense of asserting and defending their rights, they would be the first to heap ridicule on this unlimited compassion.

To identify one's self wholly and literally with him who is most miserable (and this, only this, is d i v i n e compassion), that is to men the "too much" by which one is moved to tears, in a quiet Sunday hour, and about which one unconsciously bursts into laughter when one sees it in r e a l i t y. The fact is, it is too exalted a sight for daily use; one must have it at some distance to be able to support it. Men

are not so familiar with exalted virtue to believe it at once. The contradiction seen here is, therefore, that this exalted virtue manifests itself in—reality, in daily life, quite literally the daily life. When the poet or the orator illustrates this exalted virtue, that is, pictures it in a poetical distance from real life, men are moved; but to see this exalted virtue in reality, the reality of daily life, here in Copenhagen, on the Market Square, in the midst of busy every•day life—! And when the poet or the orator does touch people it is only for a short time, and just so long are men able to believe, almost, in this exalted virtue. But to see it in real life every day—! To be sure, there is an enormous contradiction in the statement that the most exalted of all has become the most every•day occurrence!

Insofar, then, it was certain in advance what would be the inviter's fate, even if nothing else had contributed to his doom. The absolute,[22] or all which makes for an absolute standard, becomes by that very fact the victim. For men are willing enough to practice sympathy and self•denial, are willing enough to strive for wisdom, etc.; but they wish themselves to determine the standard and to have that read: "to a certain degree." They do not wish to do away with all these splendid virtues. On the contrary, they want—at a bargain and in all comfort—to have the appearance and the name of practicing them. Truly divine compassion is therefore necessarily the victim so soon as it shows itself in this world. It descends on earth out of compassion for mankind, and yet it is mankind who trample upon it. And whilst it is wandering about among them, scarcely even the sufferer dares to flee to it, for fear of mankind. The fact is, it is most important for the world to keep up the appearance of being compassionate; but this it made out by divine compassion to be a falsehood—and therefore: away with divine compassion!

But now the inviter represented precisely this divine compassion—and therefore he was sacrificed, and therefore even those that suffered fled from him; for they comprehended (and, humanly speaking, very exactly), what is true of most human infirmities, that one is better off to remain what one is than to be helped by him.

In the second place: the inviter likewise had an other, and altogether different, conception than the purely human one as to what constitutes man's misery. And in this sense only he was intent on helping; for he had with him neither money,

nor medicine, nor anything else of this kind.

Indeed, the inviter's appearance is so altogether different from what human compassion would imagine it that he is a downright offense to men. In a purely human sense there is something positively cruel—something outrageous, something so exasperating as to make one wish to kill that person—in the fact of his inviting to him the poor and the 'sick and the suffering, and then not being able to do anything for them, except to promise them remission of their sins. "Let us be human, man is no spirit. And when a person is about to die of starvation and you say to him: I promise you the gracious remission of your sins—that is revolting cruelty. In fact it is ridiculous, though too serious a matter to laugh about."

Well (for in quoting these sentiments I wish merely to let offended man discover the contradiction and exaggerate it—it is not I who wish to exaggerate), well then, the real intention of the inviter was to point out that sin is the destruction of mankind. Behold now, that makes room, as the invitation also made room, almost as if he had said *procul, o procul este profani,* or as if, even though he had not said it, a voice had been heard which thus interpreted the "come hither" of the invitation. There surely are not many sufferers who will follow the invitation. And ever, if there were one who, although aware that from this inviter no actual worldly help was to be expected, nevertheless had sought refuge with him, touched by his compassion: now even he will flee from him. For is it not almost a bit of sharp practice to profess to be here out of compassion, and then to speak about sin?

Indeed, it is a piece of cunning, unless you are altogether certain that you are a sinner. If it is tooth•ache which bothers you, or if your house is burned to the ground, but if it has escaped you that you are a sinner—why, then it was cunning on his part. It is a bit of sharp practice of him to assert: "I heal all manner of disease," in order to say, when one approaches him: "the fact is, I recognize only one disease, which is sin—of that I shall cure all them 'that labor and are heavy laden,' all them that labor to work themselves free of the power of sin, that labor to resist the evil, and to vanquish their weakness, but succeed only in being laden." Of this malady he cures "all" persons; even if there were but a single one who turned to him because of this malady: he heals all persons. But to come to

him on account of any other disease, and only because of that, is about as useful as to look up an eye•doctor when you have fractured your leg.

CHRISTIANITY AS THE ABSOLUTE; CONTEMPORANEOUSNESS WITH CHRIST

With its invitation to all "that labor and are heavy laden" Christianity has entered the world, not—as the clergy whimperingly and falsely introduce it—as a shining paragon of mild grounds of consolation; but as the absolute. God wills it so because of His love, but it is God who wills it, and He wills it as He wills it. He does not choose to have His nature changed by man and become a nice, that is to say, humane, God; but He chooses to change the nature of man because of His love for them. Neither does He care to hear any human impertinence concerning the why and wherefore of Christianity, and why it entered the world: it is, and is to be, the absolute. Therefore all the relative explanations which may have been ventured as to its why and wherefore are entirely beside the point. Possibly, these explanations were suggested by a kind of human compas-sion which believes it necessary to haggle a bit—God very likely does not know the nature of man very well, His de-mands are a bit exorbitant, and therefore the clergymen just haggle and beat Him down a bit.[23] Maybe the clergy hit upon that idea in order to stand well with men and reap some advantage from preaching the gospel; for if its de-mands are reduced to the purely human, to the demands which arise in man's heart, why, then men will of course think well of it, and of course also of the amiable preacher who knows how to make Christianity so mild—if the Apostl-es had been able to do that the world would have esteemed them highly also in their time. However, all this is the absolute. But what is it good for, then—is it not a downright torment? Why, yes, you may say so: from the stand-point of the relative, the absolute is the greatest torment. In his dull, lanquid, sluggish moments, when man is domin-ated by his sensual nature, Christianity is an absurdity to him since it is not commensurable with any definite "wherefore?" But of what use is it, then? Answer: peace! it is the absolute. And thus it must be represented; that is, in a fashion which makes it

appear as an absurdity to the sensual nature of man. And therefore is it, ah, so true and, in still another sense, so true when the worldly--wise man who is contemporaneous with Christ condemns him with the words: "he is literally nothing"—quite true, for he is the absolute. And, being absolute, Christianity has come in the world, not as a consolation in the human sense; in fact, quite on the contrary, it is ever reminding one how the Christian must suffer in order to become, or to remain, a Christian—sufferings which he may, if you please, escape by not electing to be a Christian.

There is, indeed, an unbridgeable gulf fixed between God and man. It therefore became plain to those contemporary with Christ that the process of becoming a Christian (that is, being changed into the likeness of God) is, in a human sense, a greater torment and wretchedness and pain than the greatest conceivable human suffering, and moreover a crime in the eyes of one's contemporaries. And thus will it always be; that is, if becoming a Christian in reality means becoming contemporaneous with Christ. And if becoming a Christian does not have that meaning, then all your chatter about becoming a Christian is a vanity, a delusion and a snare, and likewise a blasphemy and a sin against the Holy Ghost.

For with regard to the absolute there is but one time, viz. the present. He who is not contemporaneous with the absolute, for him it does not exist at all. And since Christ is the absolute, it is evident that in respect of him there is but one situation: contemporaneousness. The three, or seven, or fifteen, or seventeen, or eighteen hundred years which have elapsed since his death do not make the least difference, one way or the other. They neither change hin, nor reveal, either, who he was; for his real nature is revealed only to faith.

Christ, let me say so with the utmost seriousness, is not an actor; neither is he a merely historical personage since, being the paradox, he is an extremely unhistorical personage. But precisely this is the difference between poetry and reality: contemporaneousness.[24] The difference between poetry and history is no doubt this, that history is what has really happened, and poetry, what is possible, the action which is supposed to have taken place, the life which has taken form in the poet's imagination. But that which really happened (the past) is not necessarily reality, except in a certain sense, viz., in contrast with poetry. There is still lacking in it the criterion of truth (as inwardness) and of all religion, there is

still lacking the criterion: the truth FOR YOU. That which is past is not a reality—for me, but only my time is. That which you are contemporaneous with, that is reality—for you. Thus every person has the choice to be contemporaneous with the age in which he is living—and also with one other period, with that of Christ's life here on earth; for Christ's life on earth, or Sacred History, stands by itself, outside of history.

History you may read and hear about as a matter of the past. Within its realm you can, if you so care, judge actions by their results. But in Christ's life here on earth there is nothing past. It did not wait for the assistance of any subsequent results in its own time, 1800 years ago; neither does it now. Historic Christianity is sheer moonshine and un•Christian muddle•headedness. For those true Christians who in every generation live a life contemporaneous with that of Christ have nothing whatsoever to do with Christians of the preceding generation, but all the more with their contemporary, Christ. His life here on earth attends every generation, and every generation severally, as Sacred History; his life on earth is eternal contemporaneousness. For this reason all learned lecturing about Christianity, which has its haunt and hiding•place in the assumption that Christianity is something which belongs to the past and to the 1800 years of history, this lecturing is the most unChristian of heresies, as every one would readily recognize if he but tried to imagine the generation contemporeanous with Christ as—lecturing! No, we must ever keep in mind that every generation (of the faithful) is contemporaneous with him.

If you cannot master yourself so as to make yourself contemporaneous with him and thus become a Christian; or if he cannot, as your contemporary, draw you to himself, then you will never be a Christian. You may, if you please honor, praise, thank, and with all worldly goods reward him who deludes you into thinking that you are a Christian; nevertheless—he deceives you. You may count yourself happy that you were not contemporaneous with one who dared to assert this; or you may be exasperated to madness by the torment, like that of the gadfly,[25] of being contemporaneous with one who says this to your face: in the first case you are deceived, whereas in the second you have least had a chance to hear the truth.

If you cannot bear this contemporaneousness, and not bear to see this sight in reality—if you cannot prevail upon yourself to go out into the street—and behold!

it is God in that loathsome procession; and if you cannot bear to think that this will be your condition also if you kneel and worship him: then you are not essentially a Christian. In that case, what you will have to do is to admit the fact unconditionally to yourself, so that you may, above all, preserve humility, and fear and trembling, when contemplating what it means really to be a Christian. For that way you must proceed, in order to learn and to practice how to flee to grace, so that you will not seek it in vain; but do not, for God's sake, go to any one to be "consoled." For to be sure it is written: "blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see,"[26] which word the priests have on the tips of their tongues—curiously enough; at times, perhaps, even to defend a worldly finery which, if conterrporary with Christ, would be rather incongruous—as if these words had not been said solely about those contemporaries of his who believed. If his exaltation had been evident to the eyes so that every one without any trouble could have beheld it, why then it would be incorrect to say that Christ abased himself and assumed the guise of a servant, and it would be superflous to warn against being offended in him; for why in the world should one take offense in an exalted one arrayed in glory? And how in the world will you explain it that Christ fared so ill and that everybody failed to rush up admiringly to behold what was so plain? Ah no, "he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53, 2*) [*Kierkegaard's own note.] ; and there was t o all appearances nothing remarkable about him who in lowly guise, and by performing signs and wonders, constantly presented the possibility of offense, who claimed to be God—in lowly guise; which therefore expresses: in the first place, what God means by compassion, and by one's self needing to be humble and poor if one wishes to be compassionate; and in the second place, what God means by the misery of mankind. Which, again, in both instances is extremely different from what men mean by these things and which every generation, to the end of time, has to learn over again from the beginning, and beginning in every respect at the same point where those who were contemporary with Christ had to start; that is, to practice these things as contemporaries of Christ. Human impatience and unruliness is, of course, of no avail whatsoever. No man will be able to tell you in how far you may succeed in becoming essentially a Christian. But neither will anxiety and fear and despair

help one. Sincerity toward God is the first and the last condition, sincerity in confessing to one's self just where one stands, sincerity before God in ever aiming at one's task. However slowly one may proceed, and if it be but crawling—one is, at any rate, in the right position and is not misled and deceived by the trick of changing the nature of Christ who, instead of being God, is thereby made to represent that sentimental compassion which is man's own invention; by which men, instead of being lifted up to heaven by Christianity, are delayed on their way and remain human and no more.

THE MORAL

"And what, then, does all this signify?" It signifies that every one, in silent inwardness before God, is to feel humility before what it means to be in the strictest sense a Christian; is to confess sincerely before God what his position is, so that he may worthily partake of the grace which is offered to every one who is not perfect, that is, to every one. And it means no more than that. For the rest let him attend to his work and find joy in it, let him love his wife, rejoicing in her, let him raise his children to be a joy to him, and let him love his fellow•men and enjoy life. God will surely let him know if more is demanded of him, and will also help him to accomplish it; for in the terrifying language of the law this sounds so terrible because it would seem as if man by his own strength were to hold fast to Christ, whereas in the language of love it is Christ that holds fast to him. As was said, then, God will surely let him know if more is demanded of him. But what is demanded of every one is that he humble himself in the presence of God under the demands of ideality. And therefore these demands should be heard, and heard again and again in all their absoluteness. To be a Christian has become a matter of no importance whatever—a mummery, something one is anyway, or something one acquires more readily than a trick. In very truth, it is high time that the demands of ideality were heard.

"But if being a Christian is something so terrifying and awesome, how in all the world can a man get it into his head to wish to accept Christianity?" Very simply and, if you so wish, quite according to Luther: only the consciousness of sin, if I

may express myself so, can force one —from the other side, grace exerts the attraction—can force one into this terror. And in the same instant the Christian ideal is transformed, and is sheer mildness, grace, love, and pity. Looking at it any other way, however, Christianity is, and shall ever be, the greatest absurdity, or else the greatest terror. Approach is had only through the consciousness of sin, and to desire to enter by any other way amounts to a crime of lèse•majesté against Christianity.

But sin, or the fact that you and I, individually, are sinners, has at present either been done away with, or else the demands have been lowered in an unjustifiable manner. both in life—the domestic, the civic, as well as the ecclesiastic—and in science which has invented the new doctrine of sin in general. As an equivalant, one has hit upon the device of helping men into Christianity, and keeping them in it, by the aid of a knowledge of world•historic events, of that mild teaching, the exalted and profound spirit of it, about Christ as a friend, etc., etc.—all of which Luther would have called stuff and nonsense and which is really blasphemy, aiming as it does at fraternizing impudently with God and with Christ.

Only the consciousness of being a sinner can inspire one with absolute respect for Christianity. And just because Christianity demands absolute respect it must and shall, to any other way of looking at it, seem absurdity or terror; just because only thereby can the qualitative and absolute emphasis fall on the fact that it is only the consciousness of being a sinner which will procure entrance into it, and at the same time give the vision which, being absolute respect, enables one to see the mildness and love and compassion of Christianity.

The poor in spirit who acknowledge themselves to be sinners, they do not need to know the least thing about the difficulties which appear when one is neither simple nor humble•minded. But when this humble consciousness of one's self, i. e., the individual's, being a sinner is lacking—aye, even though one possessed all human ingenuity and wisdom, and had all accomplishments Possible to man: it will profit him little. Christianity will in the same degree rise terrifying before him and transform itself into absurdity or terror; until he learns, either to renounce it, or else, by the help of what is nothing less than scientific propædeutics, apologetics, etc., that is, through the torments of a contrite heart, to enter into Christianity by the narrow path, through the consciousness of sin.

[1]First Part; comprising about one-fourth of the whole book.
[2]I. e. Christ; cf. Introduction p. 41 for the use of small letters.
[3]Socrates.
[4]John I,1.
4a Matthew 20,15.
[5]Luke 11, 14.
[6]Kierkegaard's note: by history we mean here profane history world history, history as such, as against Sacred History.
[7]Cf. the claim of the Pharisees, Matth.23, 30: "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets."
[8]One is here irresistibliy reminded of passages in Ibsen's "Brand," e. g., Brand's conversation with Einar, in Act I. Cf. also p. 207 and Introduction p. 1.
[9]Matthew 11, 6.
[10]Luke 18,32.
[11]Matthew 20, 27f.
[12]The original here does not agree with the sense of the passage.
[13]Björnson's play of "Beyond Human Power," Part I, Act 2, reads like an elaboration of these views.
[14]Matthew 9, 16.
[15]The following passage is capable of different interpretations in the original.
[16]Matthew 14, 17.
[17]Cf. 1 Cor. 2, 9.
[18]John 3, 1f.
[19]Luke 23, 35.
[20]John 2, 4, etc.
[21]The passage is not quite clear. Probably, you will not be the man to explain this phenomenon in the very opposite terms, viz., as the divinity himself.
[22] Here, the unreserved identification with human suffering above referred to.
[23] Cf. Note p. 178.
[24] As my friend, H. M. Jones, points out, the following passage is essentially Aristotellian: "The true difference is that one (history) relates what has happened, the other (poetry) what may happen"; Poetics," Chap. IX.
[25] Cf. Plato's "Apologia" where Socrates is made to say of himself that he is inflicted on the Athenians like a gadfly on a horse, in order to keep them awake.
[26] Luke 10,23.