

Theodore Parker
[Outline]

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Pittsfield, MA

June 10, 1910¹

- I. Interest not formal but vital.
Parker lived in times of intensity.
Intellectual change. Transcendentalism, German philosophy.
Religious: Questions of supernatural religion
Strauss' *Life of Jesus*,² Baur. Etc.
"Jesus of Nazareth was the greatest soul ever swathed in the flesh; to redeem man, he took his stand on righteousness and religion; on no form, no tradition, no creed. He demanded not belief, but a life, a life of love to God and love to man. We must come back to this; the sooner the better."³
Anti-slavery agitation
- II. Such the conditions, what of his life?
Born, Lexington, August 24, 1810.
Harvard college. Teaching. Harvard Divinity School, 1836.
West Roxbury. Sermon on the transient and the permanent in Christianity.
Trip to Europe 1843-4.
Organization of the 28th Congregational Society in Boston.
1854 indicted by the U.S. Supreme Court for disobeying

¹ This is from the bound collection—Bundle #5; Manuscript #5—that includes several sermons from early 1910 to early 1911. A full text for the sermon developed from this outline, delivered on June 10, 1910, is also available.

² David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) German liberal Protestant theologian; he published *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* between 1835-36. In it he denied the historical value of the Gospels and rejected their supernatural claims, calling them "historical myth."

³ Theodore Parker, from a speech given before the 1840 Groton Convention, quoted in John Weiss, *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker*, New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1864, Vol. 1, p. 133.

the Fugitive Slave Law. Never tried.
Hemorrhage in 1859; died Florence, May 10, 1860.
"There are two Theodore Parkers now; one is dying here in
Italy; the other I have planted in America. He will
live there and finish my work."⁴

III. Characteristics.

Not robust—tendency to consumption. Overwork.
Intellectual giant.

"At the beginning I resolved to preach the natural laws
of man as they are writ in his constitution, no less
and not more. After preaching a few month in various
places, and feeling my way into the consciousness of
man, I determined to preach nothing as religion
which I had not experienced inwardly and made my
own, knowing it by heart."⁵

Moral integrity: Tuned to pitch of Jesus.

Two slaves married.

Letter to Pres Filmore on the Fugitive Slave laws:

"There hangs beside me in my library, as I write,
the gun my grandfather fought with at the Battle of
Lexington—he was a captain on that occasion—and also
the musket he captured from a British soldier on
that day, the first taken in the war for
Independence. If I would not peril my property, my
liberty, nay, my life, to keep my own parishioners
out of slavery, then I would throw away those
trophies, and should think that I was the son of a
coward, and not a brave man's child. ...
... I only write to remind you of the difficulties in
our way; if need is, we will suffer and penalties
you may put upon us, BUT WE MUST KEEP THE LAW OF

⁴ Quoted in Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Theodore Parker: A Biography*, Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1874, p. 535.

⁵ Theodore Parker, in *Theodore Parker's Experience as a Minister, with Some Account of his Early Life, and Education for the Ministry; Contained in a letter from him to the Members of the Twenty-eighth Congregational Society of Boston*, Boston: Rufus Leighton, Jr. 1859, pp. 45-6.

God.⁶

IV. Family Life.

Married just as went to West Rox.

Two incidents show tender deep and companionable nature of marriage.

From Journal: "At home nominally; but since wife is gone my home is in New Jersey. I miss her absence—wicked woman—most exceedingly. I cannot sleep or eat or work without her. ... But soon I shall go to see the girl once more. Meantime and all time heaven bless her! I can do nothing without Lydia—not even read."⁷

"Lay your head down on the pillow, Bearsie, and sleep; you have not slept for a long time."⁸

One dark spot, no children

V. As a man among men.

VI. Religious nature.

VII. Wasson says, "He was capable of a mighty wrath, but it was born of his love, and was never expended on account of his private wrongs; he was angry and he sinned not, for it was the anger of the prophet; indignation of wrongs done to humanity; and grand a noble, a sacred passion."⁹

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⁶ Theodore Parker, quoted in John Weiss, *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker*, New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1864, Vol. 1, p. 102.

⁷ Theodore Parker, from his journal, quoted in John White Chadwick, *Theodore Parker: Preacher and Reformer*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1901, p. 60.

⁸ Theodore Parker, as quoted in John White Chadwick, *Theodore Parker: Preacher and Reformer*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1901, p. 372.

⁹ David A. Wasson (1823-1887) American minister and transcendentalist. This passage is quoted in John White Chadwick, *Theodore Parker: Preacher and Reformer*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1901, p. 377.