

# The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Editor: DR. PAUL CARUS.

Associates: { E. C. HEGELER.  
                  { MARY CARUS.

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VOL. XXII. (No. 2.) FEBRUARY, 1908.

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CHICAGO

## The Open Court Publishing Company

LONDON: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd.

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# THE MONIST

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Philosophy of Science

DR. PAUL CARUS  
EDITOR



ASSOCIATES { E. C. HEGELER  
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MORE LIGHT!

From a painting by F. Fleischer in the National Goethe Museum at Weimar.  
*Frontispiece to The Open Court.*

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## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT JESUS.

BY DR. CHARLES F. DOLE.

### I. THE PROBLEM.

THERE is one person who doubtless occupies the most commanding position in human history. From the supposed date of his birth the most progressive and civilized nations measure time. Hundreds of millions of people bow at his name. Vast systems of religion trace back to him as their founder. Grand temples in every quarter of the earth hold him in memory and keep festivals for his sake. Libraries of books have been poured out and are still poured out from the scholarly and literary workshops of the world, making this one man's words the central point of their discussion. Along with men's traffic in wheat or in wine, the Bibles go also, telling to new readers the story of Jesus. All this is very wonderful.

What sort of man was Jesus? We mean the actual, historic person. Leave aside, at least for the time, the answer of the creeds to the question, "Who Jesus was." The creeds all confess that he made an impression as a man. We wish to get some idea what this human impression was. Is it possible, for example, to compose a biography of Jesus, or at least a sketch of his life?

From any point of view our problem must be extremely difficult. It is no slight task indeed to obtain a really clear and lifelike, not to say accurate, description of a man of our own stock and language, and as near our own time as Channing or Washington, only a hundred years ago or less. But in Jesus's case we have to make our way back nearly twenty centuries. We peer dimly through hundreds of years where books, or rather manuscripts, were extremely rare, and careful scholarship as we know the term was rarer still; we reach back to an age of superstition and credulity; we come at last upon a few bits of writing which constitute almost the sole

authority of our knowledge for the beginnings of Christianity: I mean the New Testament books, the Gospels, the Acts, and the Epistles. Outside of these writings we know nothing authentic about Jesus. Moreover most of the New Testament does not profess to give us any information about him. Paul obviously had only the slightest acquaintance with his teachings, which he hardly more than quotes once, or of his historic life which he seems to slight in favor of a somewhat mystical theory of his personality. We are shut up to the four Gospels, three of them in large part merely paralleled with one another, and the fourth, a psychological problem at the best to every one who studies it carefully.

As to the Fourth Gospel, candor compels the admission that all its material, whether of story or teaching, has passed through the alembic of a mind so subtle, so mystic, so individualistic, that you can never distinguish the substance of his own contribution of thought and sentiment from the original matter with which he deals. His literary style, his somewhat philosophical interests, his allusions, as for example, to the Jews, as though they were a foreign people, his extraordinary discrepancies from the synoptic Gospels, make it wellnigh incredible that the work comes from an actual disciple of Jesus, least of all, a Galilean fisherman. The best that any one can claim is, what Matthew Arnold suggested, that the author had some relation to John, or had certain traditions from him. At the best, we are not shown in this Gospel a real and tangible man. It is not veritable flesh and blood; it is an ideal character, about no single incident of whose career, and no distinct paragraph of whose doctrine can you be certain that you rest upon the bed-rock of fact. It is precisely like certain early paintings of Jesus in which the artist has obviously put his own ideal on the canvas. The picture is interesting, but it is not the actual Jesus whom we seek. At any rate no one can ever be in the least confident that the treatise makes us better acquainted with the actual Jesus, while all the presumption is against such confidence.

Setting the Fourth Gospel aside, as we must if we ask for reality, we confessedly have no narrative from the pen of an eye witness or acquaintance of Jesus. All the four Gospels indeed are anonymous. The most conservative student cannot throw one of them, in its present shape, back to within a generation of the time of Jesus's death. There is nothing to show that, growing slowly out of traditions and reminiscences more or less accurate, and possible early bits of memoirs of Jesus's sayings, the Gospels were not a hundred years in shaping themselves as we now have them. It is



most unlikely that they took the form of the Greek language in Palestine, but rather that they developed far away from where Jesus lived, in order to meet the demands of foreign communities. This was an age when the most extraordinary happenings were looked for and eagerly believed. Moreover, the earliest Christian books had their growth beyond the range of any hostile criticism. We have only to mention the name of Christian Science, not to say Persian Babism, to remind ourselves how all sorts of wonderful stories, once easily started and springing out of the soil, tend to move on and get accretions in an atmosphere that craves material on which to nourish its faith.

Bearing these considerations in mind, what matter of solid knowledge about Jesus do we find in our Synoptic Gospels? A few pages at the most—the amount of a little pamphlet—out of which all the ponderous biographies have been elaborated, without the addition of practically a single incident or important new teaching. A considerable part of the material consists in wonder-stories or miracles. The story of the final days of Jesus's life, concluding with his trial and death, makes a generous percentage of the whole narrative. The connection of events is slight: we can never know how long Jesus spent in public life,—barely more than a year if we only consult the Synoptic Gospels. Except for the bit of story from Luke about his visit to Jerusalem at the age of twelve, we know nothing except his parentage from Joseph and Mary, till he suddenly appears, a mature man, from a possible period of sojourn in the desert, waiting among the crowd who come to the baptism of John at the Jordan. Only a very few personal incidents, here and there a glimpse as of one passing us in the street, serve to reveal the real man. How we strain our eyes as it were to see what he looks like, to catch the tone of his voice, to get for one long moment the clear impress of his personality. Who can honestly say that he ever feels acquainted with Jesus? What modern admirer of his would really leave his business and accompany Jesus in his wanderings?

Bear<sup>6</sup>in mind that there are 2800 verses in the three Gospels. Practically the whole substance of Mark with its 678 verses is incorporated bodily in one or both of the other evangelists. Except for the birth stories and the expansion of the resurrection story, there is little new material touching Jesus's life in Matthew or Luke that is not already contained in Mark. We gain in the two larger Gospels, however, a considerable expansion of his teachings, especially in the matter of "the Sermon on the Mount," and the parables.

More than a fourth of Mark, or about 180 verses, consists of the miracles or wonder stories. More than another fourth, or about 200 verses, consists of Jesus's teachings. Only about 160 verses, or less than a fourth, give us the story of Jesus, aside from the teachings and wonder stories. Of this portion one-half is the story of his trial and death. A certain remainder of the Gospel, such as the narrative of John the Baptist, refers to other subjects besides the story or teachings of Jesus. The amount of strictly biographical material in the other Gospels is not much greater than in Mark,—perhaps 200 verses in Matthew, more than half of which is the story of the trial and death, and 180 verses in Luke with 80 verses about the last days. Outside of the last days of Jesus's life, we cannot claim to have altogether in all the evangelists the amount of more than about two chapters or fifty verses each of strictly biographical material, besides perhaps even similar chapters of wonder-stories, and eight or nine chapters of teachings.

Moreover, thanks to an army of scholars and critics, dissecting every verse in the New Testament, we have arrived at such a point of uncertainty as to the relative value of different elements in the Synoptic Gospels, that every one practically may take what he likes, both of the narrative and teaching, and reject as unauthentic or improbable whatever seems to him incongruous or unworthy. Does a modern man shy at the birth stories in Matthew and Luke? There is every reason to believe that they never formed a part of the earlier tradition about Jesus; in fact they confuse and defeat one another. Does any one doubt the story of the resurrection of Jesus's body? All the best scholars are with him in the doubt; the different stories discredit each other. Does one dislike to believe that Jesus cursed the figtree, or sent a horde of demons to destroy the Gadarene peasants' swine?<sup>1</sup> No one needs to believe anything that he may deem an accretion upon the Gospels. Does any one question whether Jesus prophesied the speedy end of the world in the famous and numerous verses concerning the Second Coming of the Son of Man?<sup>2</sup> Then, this whole group of teachings may be modified to any extent or quite swept away! Does any one, on the other hand, find the beatitudes scattered about in the Old Testament, and the Golden Rule already enunciated there? Very well! There are two quite different versions of the beatitudes in any case, with much unlikelihood that Jesus himself performed the feat of genius in grouping them together, as we now find them, in Mark.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mark v. 1, etc.

<sup>2</sup> E. g. Matt. xxiv.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Matt. v-viii with Luke vi.

How many clearly authentic utterances have we from Jesus? What can we rest upon? What exactly did he do? What did he say of himself and his mission? What commandments did he lay down, or what ordinances did he establish? What new ideas if any did he contribute? The answers to all these questions must be found if at all, in the study of a few pages of the Synoptic Gospels. No one is sure, or can possibly be sure, of these answers. The light is too dim in that remote corner of the Roman Empire of the First Century where we are at work deciphering, as it were, a series of palimpsests.

It might be said, changing our figure, that we find a very remarkable torso or at least the fragments of a statue. Amiel has said something of this sort about the remains from which we have to construct the life of Jesus. This is surely all that any one can say. But a torso is definite and complete as far as it goes; fragments and pieces are firm in your hands; you can match them together; you can reconstruct the torso. The fragments in our case crumble; they are mixed with other fragments; if they combine, they never form one and the same combination. You have not one Jesus, but two or more, each with different elements, more or less, and no one into which it is possible to harmonize all the material even of our bit of a pamphlet made up from the three short Synoptic Gospels.

I am merely stating facts to illustrate the enormous difficulty of the proposition, so often glibly quoted,—“Back to Jesus.” There is no evidence that those who repeat this phrase ever have tried to find the actual Jesus. What they say of him, their descriptions and paintings and panegyrics, almost never appear like the genuine work of even tolerable copyists. There are second-hand artists who have at least seen original work. But the conventional descriptions of Jesus not only vary; they never seem to have been near an original. The more complete and entertaining they are, the nearer they come to being pure creations of the author’s mind. They are German, or Italian, or English, or American pictures, and generally somewhat modern. They are not Hebrew, but Jesus was a Jew of the first century.

We are bound to say these things frankly, if we say anything. It is not my part, even if I were able, to add another fancy picture to the gallery of the Lives of Jesus. I can only report what I find. I find and present a problem. I do not think it can ever be solved. But it suggests certain important and practical considerations.

## II. THE REAL MAN IN TWO ASPECTS.

The fault with the conventional method of approach to the study of Jesus consists in the effort, by a sheer *tour de force*, to make the portrait of a harmonious, consistent and ideal character, and to establish a well-rounded and absolute system of doctrine. This is what men have expected and insisted upon discovering. The bondage of the old-world thought of Jesus, as a supernatural being, has prevailed even over the minds of most modern scholars. If here and there a student has ventured to tell the straight story of what he really found in the Gospels, people have lifted up their hands in protest. But granting to Jesus real humanity, and not a mere docetic appearance of a man, why should we not expect to find in him,—a true child of his age, a veritable “son of man,”—at least the usual characteristics of humanity?

I am constrained to believe that we have, first in the narrative, and then next in the teachings ascribed to Jesus, not one perfected person, but dissimilar aspects or sides of a person himself in the process of natural development; not one consistent and perfect scheme of doctrine, as if revealed from heaven, but diverse forms of thought.

Let us gather the bits of the story, such as make the basis for the idea of the perfect and sinless Christ. You will be surprised how few these passages are and how far short they fall of making such a picture. I mean the kind of passages that give you a life-like touch of the man. For example, the picture of Jesus sitting weary at the well, with his free and democratic willingness to talk with the woman of Samaria (John iv. 6, etc.) is the kind of material that we should like to feel certain about. So is the little story about the woman taken in adultery, inserted as an addition to the Fourth Gospel (John viii. 1 etc.). We hope that this is a valid piece of tradition. It gives us the great and lovable Jesus. The story of the home in Bethany and Jesus's friends there suggests a glimpse of reality. The verse “Jesus wept” in the story of Lazarus might be adduced, if it were not hopelessly complicated with the difficulties of a wonder story. Why should Jesus weep if he knew that he carried the victorious power to release his friend from death? Why on the other hand should he have purposely stayed away, as no friendly physician does, needless hours after he was summoned to his friend's house? (John xi). One might also like to add from the same Gospel the relation of Jesus to the beloved disciple who lay on his breast at the supper. This may present an actual scene.

If so, it is what we are looking for. Shall we add the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet? (John xiii. 4). I confess this seems to me artificial and, if true, symbolic. We rather shrink from acts done for the sake of example. In real life there is no need of doing such acts. This story indeed falls in with the mystical theory of the unknown author. Again, we should like to be sure of the incident where Jesus on the cross commends his mother to his favorite disciple (John xv. 28-31), all the more that we cannot from any point of view enjoy the manner of Jesus to his mother, as related in Matt. xii. 47, and the other synoptists.<sup>4</sup> Aside from these few and scattered passages, we can hardly find any biographical material in the Fourth Gospel, even granting its historicity, which acquaints us with the great, noble, lovable Jesus.

On the other hand, the general portraiture of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel hardly impresses us as winning or lovable. We are constantly disturbed by the language of egotism and self-assertion continuously put into Jesus's mouth in accordance with the author's evident conception of a mystical and Messianic personage, not a veritable man. The constant use of the word "I" almost spoils the Gospel for profitable Scripture reading to a modern congregation. Moreover, John's Jesus repeatedly assails, provokes and castigates the leaders of his people.<sup>5</sup> All this portraiture, judged by our highest standards of conduct, is unworthy of the best type of man, not to say a good God. We willingly put the Fourth Gospel aside, content to believe that its writer never knew Jesus and accordingly misrepresents him. It should be added that our ethical difficulty would be still greater if it could be demonstrated that Jesus's disciple John was the actual author. For we should then be obliged to take seriously all the harsh and even inhumane elements in the Gospel.<sup>6</sup>

Turn now to the Synoptic Gospels and mass together what we

<sup>4</sup> See also John ii. 4.

<sup>5</sup> See for example the passage John viii. 33-59.

<sup>6</sup> The Fourth Gospel gives over 200 verses of narrative concerning Jesus, besides 150 verses which relate a few selected miracles. How little of this material goes to exhibit a living man has been shown already. Even the miracles are performed for the purpose of demonstration (See John xi. 4, 15). Of the considerable amount of teachings, about 300 verses or six long chapters in all, we may gather perhaps fifty verses as containing precious or universal value. The best of this is exceedingly similar to the best material, namely, the doctrine of love, in the First Epistle of John. Of the remaining sayings, fifty verses or more, are, from an ethical point of view, unsuitable for general use, or even repugnant to the moral sense. Thus, "Have not I chosen you twelve and one of you is a devil" is full of difficulty to the modern mind (John vi. 70, see also ix. 39;) and in xvii. 9, the words: "I pray not for the world." Why not, from one who loved all men?

may find. We note first Jesus's sturdy democracy. He eats and drinks at publicans' houses. What radical freedom of convention this was! It was as if we had a story of Channing or Theodore Parker, as seen arm in arm with a liquor dealer. Jesus's associates for the most part are humble persons of the social class from which he himself sprang. We read of his constant compassion and spirit of mercy, especially as shown to the poor in works of healing.

These wonders of healing make up so large a portion of the whole narrative, as to tend to obscure the portrait of the real Jesus. To the student of psychology they fall into line with similar wonder-stories which appear through human history from the tales about Elijah and Elisha to the miracles at Lourdes, or the experiences related in a Christian Science Temple. You will hardly be able to doubt that in Jesus's case these numerous stories must have grown out of a reputed power, analogous to what we believe exists in certain men and women to-day, to soothe or quiet, or again to rouse nervous and sick people and to help them to stand upon their feet. However we may handle the wonder stories, they seem to represent one striking characteristic in Jesus, namely, his humanity and his sympathy. Here is a warm heart towards those who suffer. I hardly know, however, why we need to be surprised in finding this character in Jesus. We all know people in whom benevolence likewise is a passion. There are physicians who are daily giving their lives, without thought of praise, for the healing of people. They love, as Jesus did, to "go about doing good." This is a quite natural form of human activity.

The story about Jesus and the little children (Mark x. 13) is one of the conspicuous bits of personal narrative. All the world loves that picture. We love it because we all love children, just as Jesus did. It is a natural story. We like also the little human touch in Mark x. 21, where Jesus falls in love with the rich young man who comes to him with questions.

Furthermore, we get bare glimpses of Jesus in the scene with the woman who brings ointment at Simon's house (Luke vii. 44); in his visits to Mary and Martha (Luke x. 38); in the story of Zacchæus (Luke xix); of the widow's mite (Luke xxi. 1 etc.), and of his lamentation over Jerusalem (Matthew xxiii. 37 etc.). Such passages give an idea of a quite independent and original character, direct and outspoken in his judgments, intense in his feelings, thoroughly human, who readily commanded attention and regard.

We observe in passing that at the time when the Gospels received their present form, the dogmatic conception of Jesus as a

supernatural personage has evidently made its impress on the story. It is already the story, not so much of a real man as of a wonder-worker and a Messiah. This trend of thought dominates the Gospels and makes it very difficult to find the real man whom we are seeking to discover.

I have purposely put aside the story of the temptation. For it reads like a series of dreams; it belongs to an unreal world; it certainly suggests no such actual temptation as come to flesh and blood men outside of monasteries. It is also complicated with the doctrine of devils. So far as it presents the fact of resistance to real and human temptation, there is nothing specially striking about it. The wonder is that any of the three items related could have constituted temptation to a sane intelligence.<sup>7</sup>

There remain the longer stories of Jesus's trial and death. There is an atmosphere of traditional mystery about this series of events. The famous saying is that "Socrates died like a philosopher but Jesus like a God." There is here no such valid distinction. If Jesus had some mystic consciousness of the outcome of his death, he might well have been buoyed up as if angels were about him. If the shadows, however, gathered over him as over others in the last hour, then we can only say, what we also say of countless deaths of heroes and martyrs, that he met his death sturdily as they did too. The glory of our common humanity indeed is that it is nothing uncommon for men to be willing to die for truth, or duty, or love. These are always men who would leap at the chance of any mode of death that would lift the whole world to a new level of welfare. This is no depreciation of Jesus, but rather the just recognition of infinite values in human life to which a whole host of noble people have risen.

There are different versions of Jesus's last words upon the cross. Matthew and Mark, following apparently the earlier tradition, dwell upon the sad cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" This would seem to stand for the last abandonment of hope in Jesus's mind that the arm of God would come to his rescue. Luke, on the contrary, following a later tradition, omits this cry of despair and gives instead the beautiful words: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do;" and, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." We are left in doubt as to which mood of mind, the despairing or hopeful, Jesus at last took. We

<sup>7</sup> Grant, however, that by the orthodox theory Jesus was a man completely possessed at all times with the Logos, or the "Eternal Christ," he was thereby lifted above the level of temptation, and equally (it would seem) above the possibility of growth. But this assumption produces an unreal man.

should be glad to believe the latter, for the like of which we could cite other brave instances.

Let us turn now from the too meager material, which serves to furnish our imagination for the portrait of the great and lovable Jesus, to consider another and somewhat perplexing variety of material.

As with other human lives, so with Jesus's life, there is, even in the scanty glimpses of him given in the Gospels, more or less matter of difficulty, misunderstanding or outright inconsistency. We have to mention first Jesus's habitual attitude toward the class known as Pharisees. He never seems to show them any sympathy. He upbraids and denounces them and calls them by harsh names, as hypocrites, as a generation of vipers (Matthew xii. 14) and, if one could believe the Fourth Gospel, as "children of the wicked one:" "Ye are of your father the devil" (John viii. 44, cf. Matt. xxiii 15). Few realize how many such passages there are. It is easy to go with these denunciations against people whom we do not like. But Jesus's doctrine of forgiveness "until seventy times seven," as well as the general law of love, would seem to raise a great moral interrogation mark against the considerable mass of such passages which mark his public utterances. Why should not all kinds of spiritual disease, and not only the vices of the poor require patience and sympathy? Certain it is that the world has gone on for hundreds of years citing Jesus's example for all kinds of denunciation of the poor against the rich and of the virtuous against the profligate, especially against the sins of those who are not in our own social group.

This consideration is brought out all the more strongly in the tremendous incident of Jesus driving the money changers out of the temple.<sup>8</sup> Note that the last Gospel sets this story at the beginning of Jesus's public life. This story matches indeed, with the theory of a supernatural and terrible Messiah. But as the story of an actual man, it is nothing less than an act of anarchy, like lynch law. However noble Jesus's purpose (supposing the story a true one), he did as in the case of John Brown at Harpers Ferry, what he had no right to do. Why did he not condemn the conventional bloody sacrifices that went on in the temple? For, if the sacrifices were necessary, the worshipers must somehow be provided with the necessary animals to offer at the altars. Why was this not as legitimate a business as that of the priests? At any rate, as a man,

<sup>8</sup> Matt. xxi. 12; Mark xi. 15; Luke xix. 45; John ii. 15.



Jesus had no warrant to lift the whip over men and to destroy their property.

The stories of the Gadarenes' swine and the cursing of the fig tree are both incredible and unworthy of the Jesus whom we love to admire (Mark v. 12 and xi. 12). We will throw them aside. What shall we say of his treatment of the poor Syro-Phenician woman? (Mark vii. 26). Do you say that Jesus's harsh words to her, likening her to a dog, were only used to bring her faith into relief? But this answer does not commend Jesus's method to our sense of delicate fitness. Moreover, the words fall into line with the instructions to the apostles, not to go into the way of the Gentiles or into any city of the Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. x. 6). This type of narrowness certainly makes discord with the keynote of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Grant that we are free to discard these sayings, as an alien growth upon the pure words of Jesus. Yet it is hard to see how they can have been put into Jesus's mouth in the face of a clear and consistent doctrine to the contrary. Is it not easier to believe that Jesus was like many another good but quite human teacher in the utterance of varying moods and strata of thought? We shall have occasion to return to this same problem later, when we take up the two aspects of Jesus's teachings.

If we care now to turn once more to the Fourth Gospel, there is a well-known passage, mistranslated in the common version, where Jesus tells the people that he is not going up to the Feast in Jerusalem, whereas the context makes it quite plain that he really is on his way there (John vii. 8). I do not attribute this apparent prevarication to Jesus. I only mention it to illustrate the fact that neither the author of the Gospel, nor probably any one else at that time, would have thought it wrong to prevaricate.

Neither do I attribute to Jesus the harsh word to his mother at the wedding at Cana: "Woman what have I to do with thee?" But that it could have been related so naively shows how far from nice the ideal standard of the time was in Jesus's age.

We have still to meet the harsh, though somewhat mystical, conduct of Jesus toward his mother and brethren as told in Matthew xii. 46 etc. We should prefer to drop this passage from the narrative.

Emphasizing again how few passages there are in all the Gospels which throw any light on Jesus's real personality, I hasten on now to the comparatively full description of his trial and death. I cannot here avoid a perplexity, that grows upon me the more I

consider it. From the older and orthodox point of view it was necessary that Jesus should be put to death for the salvation of mankind. It was so necessary that it may have seemed justifiable to provoke men's anger against their innocent victim so as to secure the fated doom (Matt. xvi. 21; Luke xix. 31 etc.). All this theological prearrangement seems to us modern men artificial and incredible. It will not fit into a reasonable philosophy. The assumed character does not fit our ethical ideal. The question then recurs, why Jesus should have incurred death? The story, shorn of its supernatural features, does not hold together. It fails at least to give us a clear understanding of the *animus* of Jesus's enemies, or of Jesus's conduct.

We have yet to consider the problem of his alleged claim to some kind of Messiahship. It is enough to say now that if, as Prof. N. Schmidt<sup>9</sup> and others think, he never claimed to be a Messiah at all, the reason for putting him to death grows even more obscure. Did he court death, as afterwards the martyrs did in his name? We should hope not. Why then did he not make some simple and dignified answer in the palace of the High Priest to relieve him, as well as his enemies, of the mistaken ideas of his message and purpose? Why did he not put up a word to save their souls from the oncoming crime of murder? For his silence in such a situation must have been almost a fresh provocation to anger. Is it even possible that he uttered the stinging words in Mark xiv.62 about the coming day of judgment when his enemies should see him riding in the clouds?

If you say, as we probably must, that we have no accurate account of the trial, the question still presses:—Why did the man of good-will, the man of the beatitudes and the Golden Rule, make such bitter and stubborn enemies as to suffer a judicial murder at their hands? Was their hatred related to the story of his conduct toward the money-changers in the temple, and to an habitual denunciation of the leaders and teachers of his people? We cannot help being troubled by this question. We do not ask a high-minded man to be eager to save his own life. We do ask consideration not to let men blindly commit a cruel crime. Something known as "the spirit of Jesus" has taught us a certain sympathy with the stupid, misguided, excited humanity, which by some fatal misapprehension had been stirred to enmity against a friendly man.

The point that I want to bring out is that the story is told in all the Gospels upon the distinct presupposition, that it was neces-

<sup>9</sup> *The Prophet of Nazareth.*

sary, and that Jesus knew it was necessary, to meet a violent death. His will apparently was to die. This leaves us with a grave problem of conduct, or else in a state of bewilderment as to the accuracy of our knowledge of the facts of his end.

It is evident by this time that no one can make anything but a vague and merely conjectural narrative of the life of Jesus. The points of our information are not near enough together to light up a continuous pathway. Asking simply what the facts are, we may summarize what we know with fair probability as follows: Jesus was born a little before the assumed date of 1 A. D. in the little town of Nazareth in Galilee. His father was Joseph, a carpenter, and his mother was Mary. He was the eldest of a family of several children and he was brought up to his father's trade. He seems to have had some teaching in the Jewish Scriptures such as may have been provided in the synagogue. He knew at least something of the Psalms and the prophecy of Isaiah. The period was one of unusual susceptibility to religious interest throughout the Roman Empire. In Judea a notable man of the prophetic type, John the Baptist, proclaimed a popular revival of simple and ethical religion. Jesus's mind was stirred by this movement. How he prepared himself for his characteristic work, whether he spent a period in the life of the desert, whether he had been touched at all by the ideas of the puritan and ascetic sect of the Essenes, whether he had personal acquaintance with John, we may not say. He had certainly got at the heart of the religion of his remarkable race. It was his habit to retire to the wilderness for rest and refreshment and mystical communion.

He was a grown man of thirty years old, it is said, when he began his public life. He appeared first as a teacher in his own region of Galilee, with the town of Capernaum upon the Lake as the center of his journeyings. He made friends and disciples among the fishermen and others of similar social position. He taught wherever he found people, sometimes using the democratic freedom of the synagogue, sometimes gathering hearers by the shore of the Lake, or in the open country. We follow him in one journey as far as the coast of the Mediterranean in the region of Tyre. How often he had been to Jerusalem before the last fatal visit we do not know, nor how far he had ever made friends in the capital. Wherever he went disciples seem to have attended him. He taught with authority; that is, with the sense of the reality of his message. Jesus was not merely a prophet of the righteous life or a teacher of a simple religion. He was reported to be a wonderful healer.

People followed him with their sick. It was believed that by laying his hands upon them or even by a word, he could effect a cure. He began his mission, however, with a singular unwillingness to be known publicly, least of all as a worker of miracles.<sup>10</sup> As the short period of his public life drew to a close, he put aside the earlier habit of diffidence and assumed the position of a leader.

Jesus's unconventional habits of life, his free intercourse with the poor and despised classes, and his open sympathy with them, his frank moral judgments, and in all probability a certain aggressive-ness of tone, a growing use of the weapons of denunciation and a claim to a certain official superiority as a unique messenger of God, antagonized men and specially the ruling class, who resented his treatment of them and their manner of life. He appears to have expected a collision with the authorities. Something of popular demonstration in his favor in his last visit to Jerusalem, together with a disturbance in the temple area when Jesus assailed the business of the venders there, seems to have brought the opposition against him to a head. In some sense, easily misunderstood, he was believed to have claimed to be the expected deliverer or Messiah of his people. The charge finally written over the cross, "The king of the Jews," represents this idea. With jealousy on the part of the priests and others whom he had angered, and no great reluctance on the part of the Roman Governor to get rid of a possible exciter of the people, he was speedily condemned to the death of a mal-factor. His friends all deserted him.

In the whole narrative about Jesus, there is nothing, aside from the implication of the wonder-stories (which are no more wonderful than those related in Exodus and the Books of the Kings) that would lift him into a lonely uniqueness above the class of other illustrious prophets or teachers of religion. The claim for any absolute perfectness of character, other than the ever admirable greatness of a high and single purpose, is a quite gratuitous assumption. It does not proceed from the record, but from dogmatic prepos-sessions that grew up afterwards. The fact remains that we can know extremely little of the details of Jesus's life.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

<sup>10</sup> The impression from the Synoptic Gospels is in marked contrast to the account in the Fourth Gospel in which Jesus works miracles, not so much out of compassion as in order to command men's belief in him.