

THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIANITY.

JOHN THE BAPTIST AND JESUS OF NAZARETH.¹

BY PROF. H. GRÄTZ.

WHILE Judea was trembling in the expectation of seeing the governor, Pontius Pilate, perform some deed of violence which might result in new excitement and new sufferings, there struggled into life a phenomenon so small in its beginnings that it was scarcely heeded after its birth, although, being favored by circumstances and the peculiar manner of its appearance, it gradually acquired such a mighty impetus and such Titanic power that it opened new channels for the history of the world. For the time had come when the essential truths of Judaism, bound hitherto and appreciated at their true value only by deep thinkers, were to be freed from their fetters and go forth free to spread among the nations of the world. The abundance of lofty thoughts of God and of a holy life for the individual and for the State was to overflow into the empty channels of other nations and enrich them. Israel was to begin seriously to fulfil its mission of being the teacher of the nations. If this ancient doctrine was to find acceptance in the godless and degenerate Pagan world, it must needs assume new names and new forms if minds and spirits were to be receptive for it, since Judaism with its positive character and under its old name was unpopular among the Pagans.

It was the new development which appeared during the governorship of Pilate that was to prepare the way for a deeper and warmer interest in the teachings of Judaism: on the part of the Pagan world. But as a result of the absorption of alien features and of divergence from its original source the new movement soon became sharply opposed to Judaism. The Jewish religion, which

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had given birth to the phenomenon, could take no maternal pride in it, because the daughter soon turned coldly away from her progenitor, and entered paths which it was impossible for the latter to pursue. This new development, this old doctrine in new garb, or more correctly this Essenism mingled with alien elements, is Christianity, whose origin and early career belong to the Jewish history of this period.

Christianity owes its origin to a vague feeling which dominated the higher classes of the Jewish people, and grew stronger every day the more uncomfortable and intolerable the political situation and its results became to them. The innumerable and daily recurring sufferings caused by the merciless Roman domination, and in addition the shamelessness of the Herodian princes, and the self-degradation of the high priesthood had so intensified the longing for the Redeemer, the Messiah (Meschiach) promised by the prophets, that any highly gifted person could easily succeed in finding followers ready to recognise him as the Messiah, provided only he was able either by his physical appearance or by his moral and religious conduct to make a strong impression. For indeed profounder minds were already wont to regard the entire political situation after the Babylonian exile as merely transient, a mere period of probation until the coming of the true prophet, until the return of Elias to reconcile the hearts of the fathers with the hearts of their children and to restore the tribes of Israel.

The Messianic period which was so definitely expected was to introduce an entirely new order, to create as it were "a new heaven and a new earth." With the appearance of Elias, who was to be the forerunner of the Messiah, they expected the resurrection of the dead to begin and the new world to take shape.

Accordingly, within the short space of thirty years there appeared a succession of visionaries who without any dishonest intention believed themselves able to shake off the yoke of suffering from the neck of the nation, proclaimed themselves to be prophets or Messiahs, and found disciples who remained faithful to their cause even unto death. But easy as it was to find credulous followers for a Messiah, it was very difficult to win and maintain ascendancy in the whole nation as the Chosen One. Their understanding had been so much aroused by the study of the Holy Scriptures, and the people were split up into so many factions, each making its own demands upon the coming saviour, that no one person appearing with the tokens of the Messiah could satisfy the whole nation.

The republican Zealots, the disciples of Judas the Galilean, expected for their part that the Messiah would put an end to the Roman Empire and restore the Golden Age of Davidic dominion. The Shammites probably added to this ideal of the Messiah the strictest religiousness and the profoundest moral purity. The Hillelites, who were less political and less fanatic, probably pictured in the Messiah a prince of peace who should end the inner and outer dissensions. But they were all agreed that the Messiah must come from the family of David, as indeed the expression Son of David had in the course of time become equivalent to Messiah. It was the common belief of the time that the Messianic fulfilment must be confirmed by the return home of the widely dispersed tribes of Israel, laden by the Gentiles with liberal gifts as compensation for the long sufferings laid upon them. Even the educated, who were influenced by the spirit of Hellenism, filled the future period of glory with miracles. A superhuman apparition, visible to the faithful alone, was to lead home from Greek and barbarian lands the exiled and repentant offspring of Israel.

The Essenes probably gave the most idealistic features to the Messiah and the Messianic dispensation, their whole ascetic manner of life having the sole object of advancing the Kingdom of Heaven and the time to come. A Messiah who expected to gain the adherence of the Essenes must needs renounce the world and its vanities, have power over spirits, and introduce a state of communal property, in which Mammon should count for naught, but poverty and indigence be the chief ornaments of men.

And from the Essenes proceeded the first announcement in this time that the Messiah must soon appear, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." But he who first raised his weak voice in the desert did not dream that it would sound far over lands and seas and summon the nations of the earth about the standard of a Messiah. He proclaimed the kingdom of heaven merely to invite to repentance and reform the sinners of the Jewish people.

The Essene who issued this summons was John the Baptist (that is to say, the Essene who daily purified himself with spring water). His manner of life was wholly after the Essene fashion. He lived on locusts and wild honey and wore the garb of the prophets of old, a cloak of camel's hair and a girdle of leather. John seems to have been inspired by the conviction that the promised Messianic dispensation must come if only the whole Jewish people would repent of their sins and bathe in the Jordan, that is, accept the Essene rule of life. Therefore he invited the people to

accept baptism in the Jordan, to confess and put away their sins and thus be prepared for the early approach of the kingdom of heaven (about 29 A. D.?).

It is probable that John with other Essenes had his permanent abiding-place in the desert, in the vicinity of the Dead Sea, in order to be always ready to instruct the repentant in the deeper moral significance of baptism in water. Unquestionably admission into the Essene order was associated with this. Probably not a few were found, deeper and more enthusiastic spirits, weary of the misery of the present, who streamed out to the Essene baptist. Who would not contribute to the great work of salvation and the advancement of the kingdom of heaven if it could be attained through any means that lay within the circle of tradition and custom? And did the multitude return home improved by the baptism in the Jordan, and did the symbolic act leave behind a deep moral impression? On the whole the Jewish people, and especially the middle-class citizens, did not need this spasmodic agitation on behalf of inner reform; it was by no means so vicious and degraded, and the means afforded it by the established form of religion were adequate to sustain it on the path of righteousness.

In two directions John's summons to repentance might have had a salutary effect,—downwards and upwards, upon the wealthy and the aristocrats who were corrupted by the Romans, and upon the country people whom the frequent conflicts had driven back into barbarism. But the great probably made sport of the fanatic who expected to introduce the wonders of the Messianic age by baptism in the Jordan, and the sons of the sod were too imbruted to follow the call to reform.

John's summons was much too harmless and exceeded too little the sphere of familiar ideas to give offence to the dominant party of the Pharisees. The disciples who attached themselves closely to him and followed out the manner of life of the master observed the law with all strictness and even submitted to the outward commandments regarding fasts. Even though the Pharisees, that is, at that time the Hillelites and the Shammites, were not much attracted by the Essene enthusiasm and excesses, yet there was no opposition between them and those who believed in daily baptism or bathing.

From this direction John probably experienced no interference with his activity: but the Herodians were suspicious of a man who attracted a popular concourse and who would have been able to carry people into any sort of undertaking by catch phrases which

deeply moved their hearts. Herod Antipas, in whose territory John was, is said to have sent out his guards to take him and put him into prison. Whether he spent any length of time in prison and lived to know that one of his disciples was being worshipped as the Messiah, as was reported later, is doubtful on account of the unreliability of the sources. But it is certain that Antipas had him beheaded. The story of Herodias and her young daughter, who brought to her mother the bloody head of the Baptist on a salver, cannot possibly be true.

After the imprisonment of the Baptist his work was continued by some of his disciples of whom none had such imposing success as Jesus of Galilee. The disciple soon became greater than his master.

Jesus (Jeschu, abbreviated from Jeschua, born probably about the year 4 before the Christian Era) of Nazareth, a small city in Lower Galilee, south of Sepphoris, was the firstborn son of an otherwise unknown carpenter, Joseph, by his wife Miriam or Mary, in addition to whom she bore four other sons, James, Joseph, Simon and Judas, and several daughters. Whether either Joseph, the father of Jesus, or his mother, was a descendant of the house of David is historically unproven and incapable of proof. Moreover we have not a trace of knowledge of Jesus' youth.

The measure of his knowledge may be estimated to some extent from the general condition of culture in his native province. The Galileans, removed from the capital and the temple, were far behind Judea in information and in knowledge of the law. The living exchange of religious thoughts and of discussions of the law, which made the Scripture common property for the visitors of the temple, was missing entirely in Galilee. The province which was to possess later the advanced schools of Sepphoris and Tiberias, was poor in institutions of knowledge before the destruction of the temple. But as offset to this the Galileans were strict and steadfast in manners and customs, and were unwilling to dispense with a single tittle; moreover things which were regarded as permissible in Judea were not allowed in Galilee. They were in discredit as being hot-tempered and dogmatic. From their heathen neighbors, the Syrians, the Galileans learned all sorts of superstitions. There were in Galilee many persons possessed and tormented by devils, since the ignorant narrowness of the Galileans ascribed many forms of disease to the influence of evil spirits. Through the proximity of Syria also the Galilean dialect was corrupted and mingled with Aramaic elements. The Galileans were unable to pronounce the

Hebrew purely, and confused and eliminated the gutturals so much that they often incurred the ridicule of the Judeans who made much of a correct pronunciation. The Galileans were recognised by the first words they uttered, and were consequently avoided as leaders in prayer because their degenerate pronunciation aroused laughter.

There was nothing noticeable about the birth-place of Jesus ; it was a little hill-town and not at all more fertile than the other parts of Galilee. It was not to be compared with richly watered Shechem.

By the very fact of his Galilean birth Jesus cannot have had such an intimacy with the law as the schools of Shammai and Hillel had made possible in Judea. Through the limited extent of his knowledge and his degenerate, semi-Aramaic speech, his activity seemed restricted to Galilee. But what he lacked in knowledge was made up in spiritual endowment. He must have possessed deep moral earnestness and purity of life. Jesus' gentleness and humility call to mind Hillel, whom he seems to have taken in general as model, and whose golden rule: "What thou wilt not have done to thee, do not thou to others" he made the initial point of his teachings. Like Hillel Jesus regarded peaceableness and amity as the highest virtue. His nature seems to have been filled with that higher religiousness which is not content to consecrate to God merely the hour of prayer, or a single day. He was permeated with that love of mankind which Judaism inculcates toward even our enemies. In the passive virtues he may have attained the ideal set up by the Judaism of the Pharisees: "Reckon thyself among the oppressed rather than among the oppressors, listen to abuse and return it not, do everything from love of God and rejoice in afflictions." And Jesus probably had a sympathetic, winning nature which gave effect to his words.

His whole spiritual tendency could not fail to ally Jesus with the Essenes, who led a contemplative life and renounced the world and its vanities. Therefore when John the Baptist, or more correctly the Essene, sent forth his call to repentance and the advancement of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus went to him and was baptised. Even if not formally adopted into the Essene order, he must have accepted the Essene doctrines. Like the Essenes, Jesus put a high value upon voluntary poverty and despised wealth, Mammon. Into his mouth are put the sayings: "Blessed are the poor (in spirit), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;" "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the

kingdom of heaven ;" "No one can serve two masters, God and Mammon."

Jesus shared with the Essenes the aversion to marriage ; "It is well not to marry." He commended those who make eunuchs of themselves for heaven's sake. The community of goods, a characteristic doctrine of the Essenes, was likewise not simply approved by Jesus, but directly recommended. Furthermore, just like the Essenes, he inculcated the avoidance of oaths. "Swear not at all," thus Jesus taught, "neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by your heads, but let your yea be yea, and your nay nay." Miraculous cures, which are ascribed to him, especially the driving out of devils from those possessed by means of conjuration, were familiar occurrences in the circle of the Essenes.

When John was imprisoned by the Herodian prince, Herod Antipas, as politically dangerous, Jesus simply determined to continue the work of his master. Like him he proclaimed: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," perhaps without thinking that he was to have a leading part in the kingdom of heaven, that is, in the impending Messianic age. However, Jesus may have seen that if his call was not to die away in the desert, but produce some result, he must direct it not to the Jewish people in general, but to some certain class.

The Jewish middle class, the inhabitants of smaller and larger cities, were so permeated with devoutness, piety and reasonable morality that the summons to repent and renounce their sins meant nothing to them. The utterance which is said to have been made to Jesus by the young man who sought eternal life: "From my youth up I have observed the commandments of God, have not murdered, nor committed adultery, not stolen nor borne false witness ; have honored father and mother and loved my neighbor as myself," is expressive of the average moral attitude of the Jewish middle class of that time. The disciples of Shammai and Hillel, the adherents of the Zealot Judas, the bitter enemies of the Herodians and the Romans, were not morally diseased and had no need of a physician. Rightly enough Jesus did not undertake to reform these. But neither did he set himself up as a reformer of the rich and aristocratic, the friends of the Romans and Herodians. These would have treated the untutored censor and preacher with ridicule and mockery if he had rebuked them for their arrogance, their venality and lack of convictions. Therefore, with a right tact Jesus turned solely to those who were cast out by Jewish society.

There were in Judea those who had no knowledge of the sal-

utary truths of Judaism, its laws, its brilliant ancient history and its future. There were violators of the law, or as they were called in the language of the time, sinners, who, cast out of society on account of religious offences, either did not seek or did not find restoration. There were publicans and tax-brokers who, avoided by patriots on account of the aid they gave to the Roman interests, turned their back on the law and led a morally wild life, indifferent to past or future. Not for these had Sinai burst into flame and the prophets preached; for the teachers of the law, busied more with the development of the body of doctrine than with teaching, did not explain to them the law and the prophets, but instead repelled them with their hyper-piety.

Jesus proposed to address himself to these classes of the population in order to snatch them from the gloomy stupor of their ignorance and godlessness. "To save the lost sheep of the House of Israel" was his purpose; "the well, that is, those who knew and studied the law, needed no physician," was his frank expression, "but the sick, lest one of these least be lost."

Filled with this purpose of rousing by means of the semi-Essene mode of life that portion of the people who were ignorant of the law and unmindful of God, the sinners and publicans and outcast women, to repentance and preparation for the impending Messianic age, Jesus made his first appearance in his native place of Nazareth. But here, where he had been known from childhood, he met only spiteful contempt. When he spoke of repentance in the synagogue on the Sabbath, the auditors asked one another: "Is this not the son of Joseph the carpenter? Are not his mother and his brothers and sisters among us?" They called out to him: "Physician, heal thyself." This contemptuous treatment in his own birthplace gave rise to the remark: "The prophet counts for least at home." He left Nazareth never to appear there again.

Jesus' activity met with better results in the city of Capernaum, situated on the west side of the Sea of Tiberias. The inhabitants of this city, which was located in a Paradise-like region, differed from the Nazarenes as a mild coast climate differs from a rough mountain landscape. There were in Capernaum probably more voluptuaries, more persons sunken in vice, and probably a greater contrast of wealth and poverty. Therefore this city afforded more room for his activity. His searching, earnest instruction, coming straight from the heart, found more acceptance here. Listeners from the lower classes came to him, attached themselves to him and "followed" him. Among his first adherents in Capernaum

were Simon, with the appellative Cephas or Peter, and his brother Andreas, sons of Jonah, both fishers; further the two sons of a certain Zebedee, named James and John. Also he was followed by a rich publican, called by the sources now Matthew, now Levi, in whose house Jesus tarried frequently, associating with other company from the most despised class. Women of questionable reputation, also, were among his followers, most famous of them Mary Magdalene (from the city of Magdala near Tiberias) from whom he cast out seven devils, that is, according to the phraseology of the time, seven vices. Jesus made these outcast sinners rueful penitents. This was indeed an unheard of thing at that time, that a Jewish teacher should associate with women, and especially of such reputation.

However, Jesus was able by word and example to lift these sinners and publicans, these reprobate and immoral creatures, to himself and fill their minds with the love of God, "that they may be worthy children of their father in heaven," to ennoble their hearts by devotion and holiness, and to improve their conduct by the prospect of entering into the kingdom of God. This was the greatest miracle that he performed.

Above all Jesus taught his male and female disciples the Essene passive virtues of self-denial, humility, contempt of property, amicableness and peaceableness. He commanded his adherents to keep neither gold nor silver nor bronze in their scrip, not to possess two cloaks, not to wear shoes on their feet. He set children before them as examples, that they should become as free from sin as these and experience in themselves a new birth, in order to become members of the approaching Messianic kingdom. The commandment to love one's neighbors and cherish good-will he developed into unselfishness. "If any one strike thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also, and if any one take thy cloak, give him thy coat also." He taught the poor not to worry about food and drink and clothing: he pointed out to them the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field, who are fed and clothed without taking care. The rich he taught how rightly to give alms, "that the left-hand might not know what the right-hand was doing." He gave directions how they should pray in their chambers, and composed for the purpose a short form (the Lord's Prayer), which was perhaps already in use among the Essenes.

Jesus made no attack on existing Judaism; he had no thought of becoming a reformer of the Jewish doctrines, or indeed of introducing anything new, but simply of leading sinners into righteousness and holiness of life, in order to make them fit for the Messianic

age. He dwelt with emphasis upon the unity of God, and had not the remotest intention of modifying the Jewish conception of God. Once when a scribe asked him what was the essence of Judaism, he replied: "Hear, O Israel: our God is one God; and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Those, he said, were the chief commandments. His followers, who remained true to Judaism, handed down this declaration by him: "I am not come either to increase or to diminish the law. Heaven and earth shall pass away sooner than one jot of the law." Jesus had no objection to raise to the existing system of sacrifices; he only demanded, as indeed the Pharisees also did, that reconciliation with men should precede atonement with God. Jesus did not even reject fasting absolutely, but demanded that it be practised without display and hypocrisy. He wore on his robe the tassels prescribed by law. He stood so wholly within the Jewish fold that he even shared the Jewish prejudice of his time so far as to thoroughly despise the heathen world. He wished to have nothing to do with the heathen. "One should not cast that which is sacred to the dogs, nor throw pearls before swine, lest they tread them under foot and destroy them."

The merit of Jesus, and it is no slight one, consists chiefly in putting new earnestness into the regulations of Judaism, as Hillel had done, interpreting them with the heart and the soul, emphasising particularly the relation of the Israelites to their God as that of children to a father, making strongly prominent the brotherhood of men, wishing to put the laws of morality into the foreground, and finally making this doctrine of sanctity and intimacy with God acceptable to beings whose moral character was wrecked.

But Jesus would scarcely have won such a devoted following and had such a successful activity through mere instruction, if he had not aroused the sense of the marvellous in men's minds by something extraordinary. His outward appearance, his eccentric manner, his appealing mode of teaching, may indeed have made a strong impression. But in order to rouse a lasting enthusiasm in stolid people who were indifferent to ideals, and to gain their unconditional confidence, required some extraordinary performance which would captivate the imagination of the masses. Now the sources of Christian history are full of accounts in the most manifold garb and phraseology of the marvellous cures effected by Jesus. The ability to effect marvellous cures, especially upon those possessed, was so much an essential feature of the results ascribed to Jesus, that his followers made more of this power than of an especially holy life. The multitude admired more Jesus' power

over evil spirits and Satan than his moral greatness. To persons of a low grade of culture he appeared to be an extraordinary being only when he had once, or several times, cured an epileptic, perhaps by mental influence.

Encouraged by his success in Capernaum, where he first found a group of disciples, Jesus travelled about among the cities of Galilee and spent some time in the second capital, Bethsaida (Julias), in Magdala, and in Chorazin, gathering followers.

However, his influence in Bethsaida and Chorazin cannot have been lasting, for a denunciation of these cities is ascribed to him, on account of their indocility. They were anathematised by him as like Sodom and Gomorrah. But his faithful disciples, male as well as female, who followed him everywhere, did everything as he directed. As they weaned themselves from their former immoral and impious life, so also they put away their possessions and adopted community of goods. Communion in food and drink was the outward tie that bound Jesus' disciples to one another. By the contributions of the rich publicans even his poor followers were relieved of all care for food, and this attached them to Jesus still more. Among his followers Jesus selected for more intimate intercourse those who seemed to him by virtue of their greater receptivity or their stronger character more calculated to advance his purpose.

The aim, the center, of all his thoughts, the secret locked up in his own breast, was revealed by Jesus one day to this more intimate circle of disciples. He led them into a secluded region at the foot of Mount Hermon, not far from Cæsarea Philippi, the capital of Philip the tetrarch, where the Jordan gushes forth from gigantic rocks; this solitary region he chose in which to reveal to them his most secret thoughts. But he managed it in such a way that the disciples seemed to draw out from him this notion: that he was the expected Messiah. He asked them for whom his followers took him. Some said, he was the expected Elias, the immediate forerunner of the Messiah; others said that he was the prophet whom Moses had foretold. Then Jesus asked, "But whom say ye that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "Thou thyself art the Messiah" (Christ). Jesus commended the insight of Peter, admitted his Messianic calling, but forbade his disciples to reveal it, or to say anything about it for the present. This moment veiled in mysterious darkness, was the birth-hour of Christianity. When later his most intimate disciples, Simon Peter and James and John the sons of Zebedee, timidly remarked to him that the Messiah was to be preceded by the forerunner Elias, Jesus intimated that he had

already appeared in the person of John the Baptist, without having been recognised.

Jesus never called himself the Messiah, but used instead other expressions which were probably current in Essene circles. He called himself Son of Man, with reference to a verse in the Book of Daniel, "Behold a son of man came in the clouds of heaven and appeared before the ancient of days." This verse indeed characterises the People of Israel by its connexion as the Messianic people, but at this later time it was interpreted by a forced construction as referring to a Messianic personality. Another designation was used by Jesus for his Messianic function, the significant word "Son of God," also, probably, an allusion to the verse of the Psalm, "God spoke to me: Thou art my son, to-day have I borne thee." Did Jesus use this expression merely as a symbol for Messiah, or did he intend to have it taken literally? He never declared himself on the matter more closely, not even later when he was tried for it. His followers themselves were not agreed later as to the sense of the phrase, and their varying interpretations of it divided them into sects; out of this came a new deification.

II.

When Jesus revealed himself to his disciples as the Messiah, and yet commanded them to keep the matter a secret, he comforted them with the declaration that the time was not yet come, but that a time would come when "they would be able to proclaim in the light what he had told them in the darkness, and then they would be able to preach from the housetops what had been whispered into their ears." But the opposite of what Jesus and his disciples expected actually happened. As soon as it was noised abroad—for the disciples probably were not discreet—that Jesus of Nazareth was not merely preparing the way for the kingdom of heaven, but was himself the expected Messiah, public opinion turned against him. People expected of him signs and proofs of his Messianic mission which he did not give, and he evaded questions regarding it. Many of his followers are even said to have taken offence at him and left him, "going no longer in his way."

If he did not wish to give an impression of weakness to his disciples he must needs do something to crown his work, or he must give up. They expected that he should soon appear as Messiah before the eyes of the whole nation in the capital of the country. His own brothers are said to have appealed to him to go to Jerusalem, in order that his disciples might see his works. "For no

one doth anything in secret, but desireth to make himself known; if thou doest such things, reveal thyself to the world." And so Jesus finally determined to enter upon the painful journey to Jerusalem. He was not secure in Galilee anyway, and seems to have fled from place to place, hunted and pursued by the spies of the tetrarch Herod Antipas. When in his persecution some one proposed to join him Jesus said to him: "The foxes have holes, the fowl have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." As though to avoid any mistaken notion that he proposed to abolish the law, he replies to a Pharisee who wished to join him and had asked about the conditions: "If thou wouldst attain eternal life, observe the law, sell what thou hast and give it to the poor," that is, share it with his followers who were vowed to poverty.

Having passed through Jericho and reached the vicinity of Jerusalem he did not establish himself in the midst of the capital, but took up his abode in the neighborhood of the wall, in the village of Bethany, at the foot of the Mount of Olives, where at the time were settled the lepers who were excluded from the Holy City. He found refuge in the house of one of these lepers named Simon. The other followers whom he found in Bethany belonged also to the humblest class: Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha.

Over Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem and his appearance in the temple, legend has cast a halo of glorification which contains few historical elements. The people are said to have conducted him to Jerusalem in triumph shouting Hosanna. But the same people are said to have demanded his death a few days later. Both these reports are inventions, the one to prove his recognition as Messiah on the part of the people, the other in order to place the blood-guilt of his execution upon the whole Jewish people. Just as unhistorical is the report that Jesus used violence in the temple, upset the tables of the money-changers for the temple tithes and drove the dove-sellers out of the temple.

The most important portion of his life, the attitude which Jesus assumed toward the people in Jerusalem, toward the sanhedrin, and toward the factions; whether he really proclaimed himself as the Messiah and how this was received, just this is depicted in the sources in such dazzling colors that one cannot distinguish the historical basis from the legendary embellishments. It is altogether likely that there existed prejudices against him in the capital. The educated portion of the people expected the Messianic salvation from anybody but a Galilean untrained in the law. Indeed the notions cherished for centuries were violated by the thought of see-

ing the Messiah come from Galilee, whereas he was expected from Bethlehem of the tribe of David. The proverb, "What good can come out of Nazareth?" probably grew up at this time. The orthodox were generally offended at him because he associated with sinners, publicans and harlots, and ate and drank with them. Even the disciples of John, that is, the Essenes, seem to have been offended by his violations of their code. All of these striking peculiarities, which seemed out of place in the Messiah, left the leaders of the nation, the Scribes, cold toward him, and he probably received no friendly welcome in Jerusalem. But all these offences were nevertheless no cause for an accusation against him, and accordingly nothing could be done against him. Free expression of opinion had become so much a matter of custom through the frequent debates between the schools of Shammai and Hillel that no one was very likely to be persecuted because of his difference in religious views, provided he did not violate generally observed religious regulations or offend against the Jewish idea of God.

In this very respect, however, Jesus exposed a weak side to attack. The report had indeed been spread that he called himself "Son of God," a phrase which, if it was to be taken in its surface sense, infringed too seriously upon the religious convictions of the Jewish nation for its representatives to pass it over with indifference. But how was the tribunal to arrive at certainty as to whether he had really proclaimed himself as the "Son of God," and what interpretation he gave to the term? How were they to find out a matter which was a secret of his private circle, and the sense in which he himself wanted it understood? To this end a traitor from this very circle was needed, and such a one was found in Judas Iscariot (Ischariot), who, impelled by greed, as the story goes, betrayed to the court the one whom he had hitherto revered as the Messiah.

As soon as the officers seized Jesus all his disciples deserted him and sought safety in flight; Simon Peter alone followed him at a distance. When day dawned on the fourteenth of Nisan, the feast of Passover, that is the day of preparation before the festival of unleavened bread, Jesus was brought before the sanhedrin, in which the high priest Joseph Caiphas presided. The hearing consisted of an attempt to satisfy the court whether Jesus pretended to be the Son of God, as certain witnesses had testified. It sounds quite incredible that he should have been tried on the charge of having previously declared that he could destroy the temple and build it again in three days. Such a declaration, if really made by

him, could have been nothing but an occasion for laughter. On the contrary, the accusation against Jesus was blasphemy, and whether he asked to be regarded as the Son of God. To the questions propounded to him to bring this out Jesus was silent and gave no answer whatever. When the presiding officer asked him a second time whether he was the Son of God, he is said to have replied: "Thou sayest it," and is said to have added, that they would "soon see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God and coming in the clouds of heaven." From this utterance, if he may be believed to have made it, the judges were justified in inferring that he regarded himself as the Son of God. The high priest thereupon rent his garment over the blasphemy he had heard, and the court condemned him as a blasphemer. Appearances were against him. The confirmation of the sentence, or rather the permission for the execution, was obtained by the sanhedrin from the prefect Pontius Pilate, who was in Jerusalem at the time of the celebration.

Pilate, before whom Jesus was brought, questioned him regarding the political side of his activity, whether as Messiah he proclaimed himself to be the King of the Jews, and when Jesus gave the ambiguous answer, "Thou sayest it," the governor also pronounced sentence of death upon him. This was but his official duty. But the feature of the account is pure invention which represents Pilate as declaring Jesus innocent and wishing to save him, while the Jews were insisting upon his execution.

If Jesus was mocked and forced to wear a crown of thorns in ridicule of his Messianic royalty, this insult did not come from the Jews, but from the Roman soldiers, who were probably glad to mock in him the Jewish nation. On the contrary his Jewish judges were so little dominated by passionate hatred toward his person that they gave to him, as to every condemned person, the cup of wine and hyssop to numb him and soften the pains of death.

As Jesus was scourged before his execution Pilate must have treated him in accordance with Roman law; for the scourging of one condemned to death was entirely unknown to Jewish law. Hence it was the Roman bailiffs (*lictores*) who took delight in scourging with rods or ropes the alleged "King of the Jews." It was they also who nailed him to the cross, inflicting in accordance with Pilate's command the ignominious death prescribed by Roman law. For on the utterance of sentence of death by the Roman officials who had jurisdiction in capital crimes the condemned ceased to belong to his own nation, but became subject to Roman laws.

Not the Jewish sanhedrin, but Pilate, caused Jesus to be executed as a stirrer up of sedition and state offender.

The Christian sources claim that he was crucified alive at nine o'clock in the morning and gave up the ghost only about three in the afternoon, and that his last word was the phrase from the Psalms, in Aramaic: "God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me! (Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani). They also report that the Roman soldiers in mockery nailed over the cross the inscription, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

The crucifixion and probably also the interment of the body took place without the city in a burial-place set apart for criminals; it was called Golgotha (the Place of the Skull).

This was the end of the man who had labored for the moral improvement of the outcasts of his people, and had become perhaps the victim of a misunderstanding. His death became the occasion, though the innocent occasion, of unnumbered sufferings and of death in many forms for the children of his people. He is the only being born of woman of whom it can be said without exaggeration that he accomplished more by his death than by his life.

Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, became for the historical world a new Sinai.

Finally it is to be observed that these occurrences of so much importance for the Christian world made so little stir at the time in Jerusalem that the Jewish historians, Justus of Tiberias, and Josephus, who indeed mentions the smallest incidents in the time of Pilate, have not a syllable for Jesus and his execution.

When the first fright due to the capture and crucifixion of Jesus, which had scattered his disciples, was past, they gathered again to weep over the death of their beloved master. The whole following of Jesus, at least that portion of it then in Jerusalem, did not comprise more than one hundred and twenty members, and if all are included who believed in him in Galilee, not more than five hundred. Far from letting their belief in him pass like a dream, they grew still more enthusiastic for him; their reverence for Jesus grew into a sort of infatuation.

The only stone of stumbling for the disciples lay in the circumstance that the master who was to save Israel and bring the glory of the kingdom of heaven, had died an ignominious death. The suffering Messiah gave them serious pause. This occasion of offence in Jesus had first to be removed before his followers could surrender themselves fully to their belief in his Messianic calling. In this dilemma some scribe among them comforted himself an

them with the phrase from the prophecy of Isaiah, "He is snatched from the land of the living, and suffers wounds for the sins of his people," for this verse is applied, contrary to its intent, to the Messiah. This scribe probably helped the terrified and irresolute band out of the greatest embarrassment. By means of his interpretation he made to seem venerable and according to Scripture what had seemed new and strange. He gave a support to infant Christianity which was threatening at its very beginning to go to pieces.

Interpretation of the Scripture was at this time a power which could make the most absurd things acceptable and make the most incredible things seem matters of course. Without some support in Scripture, however weak, no innovation could find approval and permanence. With this strange interpretation of the Prophet Isaiah, to the effect that a period of suffering was foretold for the Messiah, the difficulty was solved for the believers in Jesus: all had come as it had been decreed. Even the fact that Jesus was executed as a criminal became significant, in order that the prophecy regarding the Messiah might be literally fulfilled. Was it not foretold that he would be counted among the malefactors? His disciples claimed to have heard from Jesus while he yet lived that he was to incur persecutions and even death. Thus suffering and death became a proof of his Messianic calling. His followers went through his career and found in every insignificant circumstance a higher Messianic meaning; even the fact that he was not born in Bethlehem, but in Nazareth, was declared to be the fulfilment of a prophecy: "That he may be called a Nazarene (Nasiræan?)" And so his followers were convinced that Jesus the Nazarene was the Christ (Messiah).

When the spirits of the believing were assured on this point, it was difficult to meet another question, "When, then, is the promised Kingdom of Heaven to come if the bearer and accomplisher of the kingdom has died on the cross? Hope gave the answer: "The Messiah will come again in his glory with the angels of heaven, and then he will reward every one according to his deeds." They believed that "some of those now living will not taste death till they have seen the Son of Man come to his kingdom." Therefore the believing expected the return of Jesus any moment, differing in this not at all from other Jews, but only in applying this Messianic expectation to an already known personage. Upon his return Jesus was to establish the Millennium, the Sabbatical Millennium after the expiration of the six thousand years of earth's existence, which was to bring to the faithful all the delights of

peace and every earthly bliss. In order to support this belief it would not do to admit that Jesus had succumbed to death, but it was necessary to claim that he had been resurrected. The Biblical account of the Prophet Jonah, who was said to have been in the whale's belly three days, was interpreted to mean: Jesus was three days in the tomb and then rose, and his tomb was found empty. Several of his followers claimed to have seen him, now here now there, after his death, and even to have eaten fish and honey with him. This credulity found not even the least reason to doubt his Messianic character.

However, greatly as the first believers revered and glorified Jesus, they did not remove him from the sphere of humanity; their infatuation did not reach the point of regarding him as God. They merely considered him an exceptionally gifted man, who, solely because he had fulfilled the law as none before him had done, was found worthy to be the Messiah of God. Accordingly they did not deviate from the law of Judaism, but observed the Sabbath, circumcision, the regulations regarding food, and considered Jerusalem and the temple sacred. But in addition to the belief in a Messiah who had already appeared, they had some peculiarities borrowed from the Essenes. The voluntary acceptance of poverty, which Jesus had taught them, was a prominent feature with the latter. From this voluntary poverty they were called Ebionites (the Poor), a name which they assumed themselves or received from outsiders. This of itself made the community of goods necessary, so that every new member sold his property and turned over the proceeds to the common treasury. In this respect the first Christians, or Jewish Christians,—called by the Jews Nazarites or Nazarenes,—did not deviate from their predecessors, the Essenes. For the management of their funds and the care of the common table they appointed seven managers, as was customary in every Jewish congregation. The Essene manner of life of the first followers of Jesus appeared also in their abstinence from meat and wine, their celibacy, their contempt of oil for anointing and of superfluous garments; a single garment of white linen was all they wore.

It is told of James the brother of Jesus, who was chosen on account of relationship as leader of the first Jewish-Christian congregation, and regarded by them as a model, that he drank no wine or other intoxicants, ate no meat, suffered no razor to touch his head, wore no woolen garment, but only one of linen, and had altogether but one garment. He lived in strict accordance with the

law, and was impatient when Jewish-Christians permitted themselves to violate it.

In addition to James the other elders of the first Ebionite congregation were Simon Cephas, or Peter ben Jonas, and John ben Zebedee. These favored disciples were called the pillars of Christianity. Simon Peter was the most active of all the disciples of Jesus, and exerted himself to gain adherents for the belief in Jesus and for the Christian rule of life. However, he is depicted as of wavering character. The Christian sources declare that he denied Jesus three times when the latter was taken prisoner, and that the master himself called him weak in the faith. He, as well as the other disciples, claimed to have been commissioned by Jesus to go to the "lost sheep of the House of Israel," in order to give them a share in the communion of the Kingdom of God. Like Jesus and John the Baptist, they were to proclaim the Kingdom of Heaven.

Hardly more than born, Christianity set about the conquest of proselytes; this was their inheritance from the Essene order. The disciples claimed to have received from Jesus the gift of curing the sick, of driving out evil spirits, and of raising the dead. The exorcism of evil spirits they regarded as a standing function of the elders, and spread the belief in the power of Satan,—a power which had been made real by this very belief.

Within orthodox Judaism the belief in evil spirits had been of an innocent nature, without religious coloring; only with Christianity was it raised to the rank of an article of faith, to which hecatombs of human beings were afterwards sacrificed. The reception of a new member was preceded by an exorcism of evil spirits, as though he had been possessed by the Devil before. The innocent bathing in the river of the Essene rule became in Christian circles an important, mystical ceremony. It is no wonder that the Jews regarded the Nazarenes, and the Pagans the Christians, as exorcisers and magicians.

During the first decades after the death of Jesus the Christians received little attention in Jewish circles. Because of the humble classes to which they belonged they escaped notice. They constituted a narrow sect, and were probably reckoned among the Essenes with whom they had so much in common. Indeed they would have vanished entirely had not a man arisen later who gave to the sect an extension and raised it to a height which assured it the dominion of the world.