

**STUDIES IN
PHARISAISM
AND THE GOSPELS**

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Studies in pharisaism and the gospels by I. Abrahams

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I. ABRAHAMS

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BY

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PREFACE

IN 1909 Mr C. G. Montefiore published what may without exaggeration be termed an epoch-making Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels in two volumes. It was intended that I should have the honour of contributing a third volume, containing Additional Notes. This plan has not been fulfilled. The reason is simple. I had promised more than I could perform. The problems proved so many, so intricate, that I have found it beyond my capacity to deal with them all.

But if the original design could not be fully carried out, neither was it entirely abandoned. A saying of Rabbi Tarphon seemed appropriate to the situation. "It is not thy part to complete the work, yet art thou not altogether free to desist from it." On this principle, Notes were from time to time written and printed, until by the year 1912 the contents of the present book were in type. Most of the Notes were actually written between the years 1908-1911. I have recently gone through the proofs carefully, and have added some references to later literature, but substantially the Notes remain as they were written several years ago. The abandonment, for the present at least, of the hope to do much more has impelled me to publish what I have been able to do.

The circumstance that this volume was designed as an Appendix to Mr Montefiore's work accounts for the inclusion of subjects of unequal importance. Certain Notes, natural and necessary to a consecutive Commentary, would hardly have suggested themselves

for a series of independent Studies. Moreover, some of the Chapters in the present book, though possibly they might pass as exegetical comments, are quite inadequate as essays. It must be remembered that it was purposed to supplement several of these Notes by further Notes on other aspects of the same problems as they presented themselves in the course of the Synoptic narratives. The author is not without hope that he may be able before long to issue a second series of Studies in which some of the omissions are rectified. In point of fact several Studies on other matters are practically written, and others definitely planned. Among the subjects to be discussed in this second Series would be: certain aspects of "Life under the Law," the "Yoke of the Commandments," "Ritual Purity," the "Traditions of the Elders," the "Last Supper," "Rabbinic Conceptions of Sacrifice and Prayer," the "Trial of Jesus," the "Am Ha-ares," the "Two Ways," the "Psychology and Liturgy of Confession," and above all the "Kingdom of God," "Pharisaic Eschatology," and the "Jewish Apocalypses."

This being the case, I have deferred for a later occasion any general appreciation of the Gospel teachings. Nor do I think it necessary to justify at any length the intrusion of a Jewish student into the discussion of the Synoptic problem. Mr Montefiore, as is admitted on all hands, rendered a conspicuous service both to Jewish and Christian scholars by his frank and masterly examination of the Gospels from a professedly Jewish stand-point. Undoubtedly *a* (though not *the*) real Synoptic problem is: how to hold the balance truly between the teaching of Jesus on the one hand and of Pharisaic Judaism on the other. Obviously, then, Jewish students have both the right and the duty to attempt a contribution to this balanced judgment. Apart from the fact that their studies in Pharisaic literature are inevitably more intimate, there is another very important consideration. Pharisaism was not a mere historical phase; it has remained a vital force, it has gone on without a moment's break from the centuries before the Christian era to the twentieth century of that era. It has been

put to the test of time and of life. It has survived throughout an experience, such as no other religious system has undergone. Hence the Jewish student is able to apply to current criticisms of Pharisaism not merely literary tests, but also the touchstone and possibly the corrective of actual experience.

There is perhaps room for yet another suggestion. Jewish students of the Old Testament have gained much from the researches made by Christian scholars, not merely philologically and in the archaeological field, but also theologically. For the Jew has so ingrained a belief in the organic union of ritual with religion, is so convinced that the antithesis of letter and spirit is mistaken psychologically, that he needed the analytical criticism to enable him to appreciate historically the difference between the prophetic and the priestly strata in the Hebrew Bible, between the abiding principles and Messianic dreams of religion and those detailed rules of ritual and maxims of conduct by which it is sought to realize those principles and dreams in actual life. But it is just because of this that the Jew may be able to return the compliment, and help Christians to understand certain phases of the Gospels. Many modern Christians seem torn between two sides of the teaching of Jesus—his prophetic-apocalyptic visions of the Kingdom and his prophetic-priestly concern in the moral and even ritual life of his day, in which he wished to see the Law maintained in so far as it could be applied under existing circumstances. The Christian scholar, impregnated with Paulinism, sometimes appears to find these two aspects of the Gospel teachings inconsistent. Hence we have the disturbing phenomenon of waves in Christian thought, the humanists who regard Jesus as almost exclusively a moralist, and the apocalyptists who treat him as almost exclusively a visionary. The Jew sees nothing inconsistent in these two aspects. The very causes which make Christian commentaries useful for the Jew if he would understand the Old Testament, may make Jewish commentaries helpful to the Christian for understanding some aspects of the New Testament.

I am well aware of the many imperfections of the Studies here presented. But I do claim that I have not written apologetically. Still less have I been moved by controversial aims. Only on rare occasions have I directly challenged the picture of Pharisaism drawn in Germany by Prof. Schürer and in England by Canon Charles. I have preferred to supplement their views by a positive presentation of another view. In this sense only are these Studies apologetic and controversial. At all events, though I acknowledge that I have fallen far below Mr Montefiore in the faculty of unprejudiced judgment, I have never consciously suppressed defects in the Pharisaic position, nor have I asserted in behalf of it more than the facts, as known to me, have demanded. I am confident that those who are best acquainted with the difficulties of the problems discussed will be the most lenient critics of my errors and misconceptions.

December, 1916.

I. A.

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It may be well to indicate the relation of the present Chapters to the Additional Notes referred to in Mr Montefiore's work. The correspondence is as follows:

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3	iv.
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