

JESUS

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Jesus by Arno Neumann & Maurice A. Canney

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JESUS

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J E S U S

BY

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TRANSLATED

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WITH A PREFACE BY

PROFESSOR P. W. SCHMIEDEL

LONDON

ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK

1906

PREFACE

Messrs. A. and C. BLACK have asked me to contribute a Preface to the little German work which now appears in an English dress, the view of the Life of Jesus which it embodies being in all essentials identical with that maintained by myself in the articles GOSPELS, JOHN, MARY, MINISTRY, RESURRECTION, SIMON PETER, in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. I accede to their request all the more readily because the author, Dr. NEUMANN, is an old pupil of mine and one of the ablest of them.

The idea of laying his little book before the English public seems to me a happy one, were it only because current English literature has hardly at present any work of the same type to show. So far as I can see, or can judge from the criticisms on my own articles in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, contemporary English opinion as to the Life of Jesus moves pretty much in extremes. On the one side the genuineness and historicity of the Fourth Gospel is maintained with the greatest confidence, as also the actuality of all the miracles attributed to Jesus, His birth of a virgin, His sinlessness, His bodily resurrection; on the

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other, it is denied that He ever existed at all. Between such opposites is any reconciliation possible?

Nevertheless the two sides cannot permanently go on either ignoring each other, or hurling accusations, whether of levity and infidelity on the one hand, or of disloyalty to science and of a reactionary disposition on the other. The inevitable question will insist on being answered: What if the other view should after all be right? And at all costs the demand for a reply must be met. To make this effective, however, it is necessary that he who undertakes the task should not only be acquainted with the assertions of his opponents, but also that he should understand the grounds of these, and indeed the whole mode of thinking out of which it arises, and this to such an extent that he shall be able to recognise in it at least a relative justice, even if mingled with error. Proceeding on this method, the student finds himself automatically impelled to lay aside completely, in the first instance, those of his own views which diverge very widely from those of the other side, and to give prominence only to such as approximate these most nearly, with the hope that his opponent will be willing to accept them, or, failing this, that he will find himself compelled for his part to come forward in the same way, with the result that thus in the end there will come to be marked off between the two sets of widely differing views a definite area within which the decisive battle must be fought.

Such has been the course chosen by Dr. Neumann at the outset of his work. Although for his own part con-

vinced, not only of the generally historical character of Jesus, but also of the historicity of a very large number of details recorded in the Gospels, he in the first instance looks away from all this, and proceeds to consider the question of the possibility of proving to a sceptic that Jesus ever lived at all. And, with a view to such a proof, he does not call to his aid all those considerations of various kinds which have weight with himself, but only those with regard to which he can venture to hope that the other side will recognise them as at least free from objection in their scientific aspect, and at most will question whether they really are sufficient to establish the conclusion put forward. In this way he marks off the ground common to the two contending parties,—a delimitation without which there can be no prospect of a successful issue for either.

The very first steps along this path, once it has been chosen, are sufficient to show how necessary it is that it should be followed. The reason is plain; it is not because the adversary is so very obstinate, but because it is not really so simple a thing as it might seem, to supply the proof of the historical existence of Jesus in a manner that shall be wholly immune from possibility of objection.

Any sober-minded observer, who should happen to have no personal interest in either the one thesis or the other, will recognise that all doubt would most easily be laid to rest if the case were that we possessed information regarding Jesus dating from the time in which He actually lived, or shortly after it, and proceeding from people who did

not belong to the number of His adherents. Information of this kind, however, we do not possess. The notices we possess, by Jews and heathen, spoken of by Dr. Neumann (p. 3), were written some sixty to ninety years after the death of Jesus, and the oldest of them all, that of Josephus, is moreover of only doubtful genuineness; and even if they are accepted in their entirety they hardly establish more than that Christ (it is only Josephus who gives the name of Jesus) was the founder of the sect of the Christians and suffered the penalty of death at the hands of Pontius Pilate.

With Paul we are in a better position. Such impugners of the historical character of Jesus as do not, like Mr. John M. Robertson, hold the myths contained in the Gospels to be connected with the story of a Jew of the name of Jesus who was slain about a century before the Christian era, acknowledge as a rule that they would be unable to maintain their position if even only the four "principal" Epistles of Paul (Rom., 1 and 2 Cor., Gal.) were genuine. If, as Dr. Neumann and the present writer believe, it is possible to show that the genuineness of these Epistles is unassailable, and that the figure of Jesus cannot be projected back into a period earlier than the Christian era, we shall be justified in regarding the existence of Jesus as historically established. Only, by this we have gained exceedingly little for the construction of a Life of Jesus; the number of data supplied by Paul is but small.

We are thus inevitably thrown back upon the Gospels. But it must be recognised by even the most conservative