

**THE JESUS OF HISTORY
AND THE JESUS OF
TRADITION IDENTIFIED**

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The Jesus of History and the Jesus of Tradition Identified by George Solomon

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GEORGE ✓ SOLOMON

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P R E F A C E.

THE present age is remarkable for the rise and development of an extraordinary interest in the history of Jesus of Nazareth. The enthusiasm with which this subject is investigated has infected the scientific mind universally, and the questions raised have agitated the thoughts and disturbed the dreams of people of nearly every rank and class over the Christian world.

At the head of those who have contributed to awaken and keep alive this interest stand the names of Strauss and Renan ; and to this subject these authors, aided by philosophy, have applied, the one the utmost keenness of criticism, and the other the utmost ingenuity of constructive art. Nevertheless, though both are men of much thoughtful originality, and possessed of that width of vision and range of culture which are due to intense study and profound scholarship, and while the writings of the one are marked by strength

and subtilty of dialectic, and those of the other by poetic, almost dramatic, sensibility and power, there is in both a deficiency, if not a total want, of that practical sagacity which is an essential requisite to any trustworthy criticism of matters of fact, such as offer themselves to scientific regard in the debated narratives.

The hypothesis of Strauss, as is known, is that Jesus is the impersonation of an ideal of purely mythic derivation, so that, having existed in idea, he was afterwards conceived to have had a corresponding existence in fact; in which view he is partly supported and partly contradicted by the Church theology, for while this asserts in confirmation that "Jesus was the lamb slain from the foundation of the world," it also asserts in opposition that he was slain again in the flesh when Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea; that, in other words, the ideal became real. But this theory is unsatisfactory, because it is not historically grounded, and because no authentic historical explanation is supplied to account for the rise and spread of the fervid traditional belief.

Renan's theory, as given in his romantic *Vie de Jésus*, is as fanciful in conception as that of Strauss, and is formed in equal disregard of historical accuracy. His chief interest is in the beauty and sublimity of

the moral teachings of Jesus, as these are reported by the four Evangelists, and he refers all in the subject of the story to a central self-consciousness in him, which, he maintains, because it is absolutely human, boldly asserts itself to be equally divine; but he leaves unanalysed certain anomalies of character inconsistent therewith, which contrast darkly with his idyllic picture and detract seriously from its dramatic truth.

Both these theories rather reflect the philosophical opinions of their respective authors than any sound criticism of history, the one being conceived in the spirit of the abstract speculation of Germany, and the other after the romantico-poetic sentimentalism of France, but neither representing or affecting to any material extent the public mind or its movements.

In England these theories have been received with very partial favour, and are not likely to be adopted into the national creed. The English people are intensely conservative, and are prone to look askance on any departure from ancestral belief. For theories of all kinds they have but a cold affection, and will not be persuaded to adopt anything novel, unless it can convincingly show itself to be grounded on the secure basis of fact. It is their respect for this latter quality, or that virtue in things which has