

**AN ANSWER TO DR.
STRAUSS'
LIFE OF CHRIST**

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An Answer to Dr. Strauss' Life of Christ by Athanase Coquerel

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AN ANSWER
TO
DR STRAUSS'
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ONE OF THE PASTORS OF THE REFORMED CHURCH OF PARIS,
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THEOLOGICAL WORKS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

" Ah me ! the laurel's wreath that murder rears,
Blood-nursed, and watered with the widow's tears,
Seems not so foul, so tainted, and so dread,
As waves the nightshades round the sospel's head."

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AN ANSWER

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DR STRAUSS' LIFE OF CHRIST.

THE appearance of this work is an event, and may be said to be the last important fact in ecclesiastical history; not that the book will be long-lived, for the time will soon come when it and its author will be buried in that gulph of oblivion in which all the deformed progeny of Infidelity are fated to perish. It puts an end to two systems of Scripture interpretation, and, unintentionally, confirms the true one, the one which alone renders glory to God, efficacy to his Word, and advancement to his Reign.

These assertions will give rise to some uneasiness and surprise. The name of Dr Strauss is surrounded amongst us with a kind of satanic halo—a sort of odour of blasphemy exhales from it; his work excites alarm, and is looked upon as an inspiration of him who is called the *Father of Lies*. The noise of the earnest and keen conflict excited throughout Germany by this audacious attack, made by the spirit of man on the Spirit of God, has reached us from the other bank of the Rhine as the weakened echo of that of the last war of the rebel angels against that heaven from which they have fallen. In the opinion of some, it is almost a sin to read these volumes, and a stigma to confess having read them. A certain pastor is said to have been much astonished to find the work lying open on the desk of the private study of one of his colleagues; and, in listening to the various reports abroad, we would be led to believe that the Gospel had never before experienced so terrible a crisis—that it has not usually triumphed over its opponents, or that, if it has overthrown them from Celsus down to Voltaire, it was only to succumb under the attacks of Dr Strauss.

But we may ask, if poisons are not kept in pharmacies, if the physicians of the soul should not make him-

self acquainted with its diseases as the physician of the body probes its sores, and if it be possible to refute an adversary without knowing the points to which the refutation ought to be directed? In our opinion it is paying a poor compliment to truth not to dare to look error in the face; it is to doubt of the power of Christianity, to fear its detractors so far as to refuse to hear what they urge against it; to act in this manner is to treat them with a blameable degree of deference and respect. For ourselves, our faith is invigorated and confirmed by every successive perusal of an infidel publication. In order to expose a falsehood, it is necessary to grapple with it at close quarters. Elias, Elisha, and St. Peter, each bent over a dead body in order to resuscitate it.

The dread which the book of Dr Strauss has inspired, and which has been doubled since a French translation of it was announced, is quite unfounded. We do not consider the work dangerous to religion, and the grounds of our assurance are these:—First of all, it is Infidelity in the form of four octavo volumes; it is Infidelity much too lengthy, heavy, and learned, to seduce the multitude; and we are prepared to wager that the work will not be found in a single circulating library in Paris or the provinces. The multitude now-a-days is desirous that Infidelity should be served out to it in small and slight dozes—it is fond of sarcasms and not of arguments; it delights to doubt, but not to be wearied by the process; it requires a scepticism that is amusing; and that of Dr Strauss is not of this sort. Then, the work is of such a nature that it cannot be published in an abridged shape in a small size; it is entirely made up of details which cannot be thrown into a synoptical form, and every one knows that it is abridgments that do the mischief. The ten big and ponderous volumes of the astronomical and mythological Infidelity of the celebrated Dupuis—"The Origin of all Religions"—have done much less harm to religion than the same work condensed into a few pages, or the small volume of Volney "On the Ruins of Empires;" and the pamphlets of Voltaire have made more unbelievers than the "System of Nature" of Baron Halbach, or the works of the Materialists, in one of which Helvetius teaches, in so tedious a manner, the art of being happy, and where the self-conceit of the writer looks out so

offensively in every page. Finally, the Infidelity of Dr Strauss is serious, and we have never any dread of a serious Infidelity. Thus, as we have just said, the book is not suited to minds of a light order; and, in being addressed to those of a grave and reflecting cast, it will find its readers exclusively among the latter. It acts as a stimulant to Christian learning and philosophy, and compels them to descend into the arena armed at all points. By opening up new points of attack, it necessitates the discovery of new modes of defence; it shows how the errors accumulated against truth may be turned to its advantage, and opens up to it ways of triumph before unknown. This is precisely the effect which the work of Dr Strauss has produced in Germany. The thoughts of God as to what is good and evil, true and false, are not as man's thoughts: he allows man to fall into error, because the reason of man is free as his conscience, and then God makes of the error a crucible, out of which truth comes with less alloy and more luminous than before. Dr Strauss' book is one of these crucibles.

The foregoing observations were necessary before proceeding to state in what the system of Dr Strauss consists, both for those who are afraid of the work without having read it, and for those who hold it in horror but at a distance, as well as for the still greater number who, feeling uneasy or offended by it, have been vainly attempting to divine what new tactics of Infidelity modern Germany may have been able to imagine after having left so far behind her all the sceptics of England since the time of Hume, and those of France since that of the Encyclopædiasts. Let us now present this system stripped of the cloudy phraseology which envelopes it, and of the numberless minute details which are its accompaniments and proofs.

In the opinion of Dr Strauss, the four Evangelists, which we possess, are popular *Legends*. During the reign of Tiberias, when the Roman oppression had awakened among the Jews the sentiment of religion and nationality, there appeared a good man, modest and obscure, who, struck with the decline of religion, and of the law reduced to empty observances, attempted to diffuse some juster notions of spiritualism and morality, drew down on himself the indignation of the Sanhedrim and the priests, and perished the victim of their jealousy

and hatred. Public opinion had been for a long time pre-occupied with the coming and the reign of a Messiah—hopes which were founded on a false or figurative interpretation of a number of texts in the poetical books of the Bible; this opinion united the whole of these biblical allusions on Jesus, placed them, so to speak, to the account and under the name of the Sage of Nazareth, changed them into events, and thus constructed for him a history. The Old Testament furnished the groundwork of the picture, and the credulity of the times placed it in the frame of the New. The stories thus connected were speedily believed, the most credulous reduced them to writing, and thence came those legends which we call the Gospels, and which have been falsely ascribed to the authors whose names they bear.

Observe now how Dr Strauss proceeds, after some general reflections, which are the least elaborate portions of his work, towards the proof of his system—Two modes of interpretation, two only, to which all the others, in spite of their diversity, may be reduced, divide betwixt them religious science.

The one is the *supernatural* system, which maintains that the Gospel is true, and, moreover, divine, its books are inspired, its miracles real, its prophecies genuine, Christ is the Messiah, and the holy wonders of his history, displayed from Bethlem to Bethany, actually took place under the direction of his Heavenly Father.

The other is the *rationalistic* system, which asserts that the Gospel is true, but is not divine, its books are ordinary historical works, the miracles are pretended or phenomena, the prophecies are anachronisms or divinations, Christ is the greatest of philosophers and moralists; but all the wonders of his history, when closely examined, have nothing in them of the miraculous, and the accounts given of them may be explained by a reference to natural causes.

How does Dr Strauss proceed? From the first down to the last word of the Gospels, from the appearance of John the Baptist on the stage, down to the events of Pentecost, from page to page, and from fact to fact, he labours to demonstrate that both interpretations are untenable, incredible, impossible; and when he has, as he thinks, completely overthrown the two rival systems, which he attacks with equal earnestness—after he has made a *tabula rasa*, and when the ground