

**THE PREPARATION
FOR CHRISTIANITY IN
THE ANCIENT WORLD**

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The Preparation for Christianity in the Ancient World by R. M. Wenley

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BY

Robert
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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

SCHOLARS who have themselves passed through a similar experience are well aware that the production of a small book of the class to which this belongs is more difficult, in some respects, than the composition of the customary exact academic monograph. Except in an attempt to make the past vivid, these pages lay no claim to special originality. Processes are entirely suppressed, results alone appear. The selection and compression, inseparable from the presentation, have been directed towards rendering the picture as a whole more impressive and less easily mistaken.

Amid the disappearance and shifting of old landmarks, so eminently characteristic of the day, it is incumbent upon Christians, and especially upon young Christians, to lay firm hold upon the essential reasons for the superiority of their faith. One is well aware that to this end several, perhaps numerous, ways lie open. Among them, not chiefest by any means, but at least highly important, is that which I have tried to sketch here. Man's unaided efforts to raise himself into communion with God and their failure, leading at length to unparalleled moral obliquity and spiritual insolvency,

cannot but afford fresh insight into the predestined deficiency of similar attempts at any time. The depth, nay, the awful horror, of the resultant crisis, and the marvellous tale of human regeneration through the power of the spirit of Christ must lead even the dullest soul to enlivened conviction and stimulated affection concerning that unique Personality who, at the first, faithful unto death in a life of loneliness such as no mortal man could have supported, at the last drew countless multitudes to Himself by the indwelling spell of His deathless divinity.

Portions of the fifth chapter are reprinted from *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, a magazine far too little read by the Christian community, one containing some admirable studies of aspects of the Jewish faith in all ages.

R. M. WENLEY.

ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN,
16th August 1897.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

"The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God."—Rom. viii. 19.

WHATEVER else it may or may not be, Christianity is one of the great historical religions. It centres in a stupendous fact; it was born into a universal empire, the state of which at the moment is matter of history; all the circumstances of the time imperatively demanded the new revelation, and conspired to the successful propagation of the "good news." Accordingly, historical inquiry may be directed to one of two points: either to the Person and Life of the Founder, or to the conditions that prepared the way before Him and speedily, when the immense obstacles are duly weighed, laid the old Roman world at His feet. Consideration of Christ's person and work is an altogether subordinate part of our present purpose, and attention must be concentrated mainly on pre-Christian customs and their meaning. For our problem is:—What were the essential features in the