

**MORBID PSYCHOLOGY:
STUDIES ON JESUS
AND THE GOSPELS**

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Morbid Psychology: Studies on Jesus and the Gospels by Jules Soury

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JULES SOURY

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STUDIES

ON

JESUS AND THE GOSPELS.

BY

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[TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.]



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PREFACE.

JESUS the God, gone down in his glory, like a star sunk beneath the horizon but still shedding a few faint rays on the world, threw a halo round the brow of Jesus the Prophet. In the dull glow of that twilight, in the melancholy but charming hour when everything seemed wrapped in vague, ethereal lights, Jesus appeared to Strauss and Renan such as he had shown himself to his first disciples, the Master *par excellence*, a man truly divine. Then came the night; and as darkness descended on those flickering Gospel beginnings there remained nought to be descried through the obscurity of dubious history, but, dimly-looming, the portentous outline of the gibbet and its victim.

In the present work Jesus makes his appearance, perhaps for the first time, as a sufferer from a grave malady, the course of which we have attempted to trace.

The nervous, or cerebral disorder, at first congestive and then inflammatory, under which he labored, was not only deep-seated and dangerous—it was incurable. Among us at the present time that affection may be seen daily making kings, millionaires, popes, prophets, saints, and even divinities of poor fellows whose heads have lost their balance; it has produced more than one Messiah.

If we be right in the interpretation of data which

has been followed in the study of morbid psychology wherewith the work opens, Jesus, at the time of his death, was in a somewhat advanced stage of this disorder. He was, to all appearance, cut off opportunely; the gibbet saved him from actual madness.

The diagnosis which we have ventured to draw is based on three sets of facts which are attested by the most ancient and trustworthy of the witnesses of his career.

1. Religious excitement, then general in Palestine, drove Jesus to the wilderness, where he lived some time the life of a recluse, as those who considered themselves to have the prophetic mission often did. Carried away with the idea that he was divinely inspired to proclaim the coming of the Messiah, he left his own people and his native place, and, attended by a following of fishermen and others of the same class, went about among the towns and villages of Galilee announcing the speedy approach of the Kingdom of Heaven.

2. After having proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, like other contemporary Jewish prophets, Jesus gradually came to look upon himself as the Messiah, the Christ. He allowed himself to be called the Son of David, the Son of God, and had among his followers one, if not more, of those fanatical *Sicarii*, so graphically described by Josephus, who were waiting for the deliverance of Israel from the yoke of Rome. Progressive obliteration of the consciousness of his personal identity marks the interval between the somewhat vague revelation which he made to his disciples at the foot of Mount Hermon and the day when, before

Caiaphas and before Pilate, he openly declared that he was the Messiah, and by that token the King of the Jews.

3. The cursing of the fig-tree whereon there were no figs, because "the time of figs was not yet," the violent conduct towards the dealers and changers at the Temple, were manifestly foolish acts. Jesus had come to believe that everything was permitted him, that all things belonged to him, that nothing was too hard for him to do. For a long time he had given evident signs of perversion of the natural affections, especially with respect to his mother and brethren. To the fits of anger against the priests and religious ministers of his nation, to the ambitious extravagance of his words and acts, to the wild dream of his Messianic grandeur, there rapidly supervened a characteristic depression of the mental faculties and strength, a giving way of the intellectual and muscular powers.

Each of those periods in the career of Jesus corresponded to a certain pathological state of his nervous system.

By reacting on the heart, the religious excitement he labored under and the attendant functional exacerbations had the immediate effect of accelerating the circulation, unduly dilating the blood-vessels, and producing cerebral congestion.

Chronic congestion of the brain, subjectively considered, is always attended in the initial stage with great increase of the moral consciousness, extraordinary activity of the imagination, often leading to hallucinations, and later on with absurdly exaggerated, frequently delirious ideas of power and greatness. That stage is

also usually characterised by irritability and fits of passion.

Objectively considered what is observable is hypertrophy of the cellules and nerve-tubes, excessive cerebral plethora and vascularity due to the great efflux of blood and superabundant nutrition of the encephalon. Inflammation of the meningeal covering, and of the brain itself, is, sooner or later, a further result of the chronic congestion. The vessels, turgid and loaded with blood, permit the transudation of the blood globules; the circulation becomes impeded, then arrested, with the result of depriving the cortical cerebral substance of arterial blood, which is its life; the histological elements undergo alteration, degenerate, become softened, and as the disorganisation proceeds are finally reduced to inert detritus.

The brain may remain capable more or less well of performing its functions when deprived to a large extent of its necessary food, but not so when the cerebral cellules are disorganised. Dementia consequently is the natural sequel of the congestive stage. To the destruction of the cortical substance supervenes partial or total loss of consciousness, according to the extent of the lesion. Such portions of the encephalon as continue capable of performing any duty being in a state of hyperæmia, there is often delirium more or less intense up to the last.

The process of the disorder is irregular; remissions occur during which the reasoning faculties seem to be recovered. But whether the duration extend only to a few months or to several years, the increasing weakness of the patient, the intellectual and muscular decay,