

*STUDIES IN THE "INNER LIFE" OF JESUS.*

## INTRODUCTORY.

1. IT has been said that the Reformation of the sixteenth century was a return from an infallible Church to an infallible Book, and that of the nineteenth from an infallible book to an infallible Person. The seat of authority has been shifted from the Church to the Bible, and from the Bible to Christ. But the modern movement is not, and cannot be so simple. The historical and literary criticism of the Old Testament has been one of the most potent factors in bringing about this change, in compelling the Church to turn from the Book to the Person; and yet an appeal has been made to Christ against some of the conclusions of criticism. If He refers to the Law as by Moses, or to the Psalms as by David, His infallible authority must be held as settling the question of authorship; if He illustrates His teaching by the story of Lot's wife, or of Jonah, His unerring judgment must put beyond all question the historicity of the narratives dealing with these persons. Thus runs this argument. Its finality is, however, denied by many reverent Christian critics, who do not doubt or deny Jesus' infallible authority and unerring judgment, but who maintain that all such questions do not belong to the moral and religious realm, in which Jesus chose to reveal truth to men, or going even a step further, in which under the necessary conditions of a real Incarnation, He alone had knowledge beyond other men. An issue, the importance of which can hardly be overstated, has thus been raised for Christian thought. Must we on the one hand deny the validity of some of the conclusions of criticism, and consequently bring its methods into discredit? Or shall we abandon the claim for Jesus of infallible authority and unerring judgment? Or can we

escape both these alternatives by so determining the range of the knowledge of Jesus, as will leave to faith the perfect revelation of God in Him, and at the same time avoid all conflict between His wisdom and criticism? This question cannot be answered on the one hand by an appeal to any Christological formulae, for these are too vague; nor on the other hand by an examination of the passages in which He refers to the Old Testament, taken by themselves, for these afford too narrow a basis for judgment. We must consider as a whole the relation of His consciousness as Son of God to the knowledge of the facts of nature and history, which varies from age to age, and is ever gaining in compass, content, and certainty. The problem is this. How far was He limited by, and how far did He transcend contemporary thought? This problem cannot be solved by a separate treatment of the mind of Jesus apart from His life, for the range and power of the intellect of any person is dependent on the character and development of the whole personality. In these Studies of the "inner life" of Jesus an attempt will be made to deal with this problem.

2. Christian theology has become, to use the common term, "Christocentric." Even the type of evangelicalism which is less ready to respond to the intellectual influences of the age speaks less now of a *plan of salvation* and more of a *saving person*. But in this movement there seems to be a double danger. It may end in substituting on the one hand a vague abstraction, the filial consciousness of Jesus, or His idea of God, for the vivid and vital image of His person, or in losing on the other the distinctive unity of His revelation in the multitude and variety of the words of grace and truth, which fell from His lips. His person must be concretely presented in order to preserve the manifoldness of His teaching in the oneness of His consciousness. While it must be a fundamental principle in Christian theology, that God must be conceived as Jesus thought of

Him; yet it must be recognized that we do not learn all Jesus thought of God by collecting, classifying, and drawing inferences from all His sayings about God. He lived as well as taught His revelation of His Father. His life is the most authoritative commentary we have on His thought. His teaching on morality and religion loses much of its power and charm, when divorced from His person. The more adequate and distinct and consistent the image of Jesus, which is enshrined in our minds and hearts, the more intelligible and credible will His revelation become to us. As it is not a *Christ-idea*, but a *Jesus-image* which must be the centre of Christian theology, these studies may, it is hoped, prove a contribution, not altogether valueless to Christian thought.

3. Christian piety desires to hold communion with Christ. By faith it knows Him present, interested, responsive, and active, although it has no sensible tokens and no logical proofs that He here and now is, lives, loves, and works. What content can be given to this communion of the soul and the Saviour? How shall we conceive or represent the Christ whom we trust? Can the apostolic interpretation of His work, can our personal experience of His saving grace give us all we need and want? Surely not. It may be said with confidence that it is Jesus as presented in the Gospels, His divine human reality, His mental, moral, and spiritual perfection (although we know His humiliation has been changed for His exaltation), with whom the souls of believers desire to come into union. Such Studies of the "inner life" of Jesus, as are here attempted, may prove to some a means of communion with the living Christ.

4. But if for criticism, theology, and piety alike so decisive significance belongs to the person of Christ, the problem of that person becomes one of the most serious and pressing questions of the age. That the ecumenical

councils or the Church fathers have said the last word upon the subject cannot be admitted for a moment by any who believe that the Spirit of Truth is still guiding the church into all truth. The apostolic interpretations of Christ, the Pauline and the Johannine, are of abiding worth, but these deal primarily with Christ in His exaltation with the glory of that state reflected in His pre-existence, and only subordinately with Jesus in His humiliation. Paul and John assure us of the *fact* of an Incarnation, but to learn adequately and distinctly the *mode* of the Incarnation, the conditions and limitations under which the Word became flesh, we must fix our regard on the Gospel testimony (including John's Gospel as well as the Synoptics, in so far as his historical record is not modified by his theological reflexion). Instead of being content with vague generalities, we must seek to lay hold of the distinct details of the life and work. To treat Jesus' formal statements about His person and purpose as exhausting all the data for Christology afforded by the Gospels, and to ignore the light cast on His being and work by many incidental suggestions in word and deed is to court failure in dealing with this great theme. A necessary preparation for treating the problem of the person of Christ is to engage in Studies such as are offered here.

5. We cannot go far in this quest without being stopped by what many regard as an unsurmountable barrier. The question is forced upon us, can we distinguish the historical testimony from the theological interpretation in the Gospels? Are not the Gospels witnesses, not to what Jesus actually was, but to what the Early Church believed Him to have been? There have been signs recently, to which it would be folly to shut our eyes, that criticism will not be content to have its own way with the Old Testament, but will claim to get its say about the New Testament. Those who imagine that, as Westcott and Hort have said

the last word on the lower criticism of the New Testament, so Lightfoot has said what can never be gainsaid on the higher criticism, are doomed to a rude awakening, if they are still cherishing this fond dream. If there is a general tendency to assign earlier dates to the New Testament writings than there was formerly in the critical school, there is no evident inclination on that account to recognize unreservedly the historical trustworthiness. To state the final issue involved in this discussion briefly and, therefore, bluntly, it may be said that the controversy turns on this one point. Was the persistent remembrance of a past experience, or the potent influence of a present environment the decisive factor in the composition of the Gospels? Answering the question broadly, it may be suggested that, if Christ has for the race the significance and value which Christian faith assigns to Him, then surely the disciples were more strongly impressed by His personality than affected by contemporary tendencies of thought and life; and being so impressed did not neglect the means of perpetuating their remembrance of Jesus in the Church He had founded. We have a right to start with the assumption, that the Gospels are what they profess to be. If study of them disproves the claim, we must be ready to abandon it; but the writer would express his assured conviction that the image of Jesus reflected in the Gospels confirms their credibility. Criticism has not been ignored in these Studies, and, nevertheless, the conclusion to which they have led is that spiritual discernment of the grace and glory of the life of Jesus removes some of the difficulties, and disproves some of the objections of criticism.

6. Many talented and distinguished men have in recent years attempted to write the life of Jesus. Many subsidiary studies of the land, the people, and the times have been engaged in to set this greatest life in its proper surroundings, in the clearest light, and sharpest outline. The scenery, the

drapery, the upholstery of this drama have received, if not excessive, at least sufficient attention. The writer has not the capacity or the resources, still less has he the inclination, to essay the same task. To him the supreme interest is the personality of Jesus. What he wants to know is not how Jesus was dressed or housed; or what He ate or drank, but how He felt, what He thought,—His "inner life," is what he desires to understand. In these Studies interpretation will take the place of description; an attempt will be made to push through every incident and utterance to the mind and heart of Jesus.

7. So fragmentary are the narratives, and so diverse their arrangement in the Gospels, that a chronological treatment of the life must often rest on very unstable conjecture. We may be able with some degree of probability to distinguish the successive stages of Jesus' ministry, and to place the decisive events of His career in relation to these stages; but it seems quite impossible to determine with any certainty the order in time of all the individual incidents. Nor does it seem at all necessary. The ministry of Jesus covered so short a time, and there was so little room in it for any marked personal development, that a distinct image of Him can be gained by considering the diverse aspects of His ministry rather than the successive events. There are decisive events which must be treated separately with due regard to order of time, but there are many other incidents, the significance of which can be more easily reached by treating them in groups as illustrative of some distinctive feature in Jesus' life and work. In the order of these Studies some regard has been paid to what seems a probable chronology, but its tentative character has throughout been recognized.

8. The method of these Studies may be briefly explained. The teaching of Jesus in His discourses or parables is not dealt with. So many learned and able works on this sub-

ject already exist, that the writer has no desire to do what has already been often done before. The significance and value of many of Jesus' incidental utterances, as illuminating and illuminated by the events which were their occasion, however, does not gain sufficient recognition, especially for the purpose in which the writer is most deeply interested—the solution of the problem of the person of Christ. Much belongs to the self-testimony of Jesus, which has been entirely ignored in the traditional Christology, or even inadequately dealt with by some recent writers on the subject. The choice of incidents to be dealt with in these Studies has been determined by this consideration, How can we better know and understand Jesus? In connexion with each incident some utterance has been taken as of decisive significance, and has been adopted as the standpoint from which it is viewed. As many of the narratives are very incomplete, and do not give us all we need for getting at the full meaning of Jesus' sayings, the writer has ventured on extending the conception of "the context" of a saying which is to be taken into account in its interpretation. We must sometimes try to recover by sympathetic imagination the actual historical situation, when that is not fully presented to us by the narrative. Such a venture can be justified only by its results. If a difficulty is removed, if a fresh truth is discovered, it is at least not improbable that the effort has been crowned with success; and this probability approaches a certainty, if in this way the consistency of all Jesus' words and works is made more evident. The resultant portrait of Jesus will, the writer hopes, prove the justification of his method.

9. This series of Studies will begin with one dealing with the virgin-birth. As the "inner life" of Jesus is to be the subject of investigation the inclusion of this theme may seem out of place. But apart altogether from the most important question of the effect of the mode of the birth in

the physical constitution, and consequently in the mental, moral, and spiritual capacity of Jesus, this event has a significance for His inner life. His growth in wisdom and favour with God and man was conditioned by the teaching and training of the home in Nazareth, and surely that education was influenced by His mother's consciousness of His relation to God, and of her own grace from God in being chosen to be His mother. We must believe, however, that the influence of this event on His personal development was thus mediated by His mother, as it seems incredible that the fact could have been known to the youth even. Probably the secret was disclosed only when manhood was reached. A study of the mind and heart of Mary, so far as the narrative discloses her thoughts and feelings, belongs rightly to this series. But it may be objected, if we go back so far, should we not go back further, and begin with Jesus' consciousness of pre-existence. A summary answer, which will afterwards be justified, is all that can now be given. The writer confidently holds that the certainty of pre-existence did not emerge in Jesus' consciousness, until His personal development was well advanced. Although we may not be justified in assigning its mental emergence to as late a period as its verbal expression, according to John's testimony, yet it seems inconceivable that there could be growth of mind and heart in any intelligible sense if this certainty were possessed in clear and full consciousness from the beginning. As we seem justified in assuming that Jesus gradually attained the certainty of His divine sonship and His Messianic vocation, so we are warranted in concluding that only slowly did there dawn in His "inner life" the glory which He had with the Father before the world was.

10. In conclusion, a few words may be added on the writer's theological standpoint in these Studies. He holds that the Christian Church cannot without immeasurable spiritual loss abandon its confession of the divinity of Jesus



as God's "only-begotten and well-beloved Son." But he holds also that in much Christian thought the difference between the state of humiliation and of exaltation is ignored, and Jesus in the days of His flesh is thought of as in all points like the Lord in His glory. Thus justice is not done to His real humanity. Even when His humanity in some of the features of His earthly life is recognized, yet, as His divinity is not regarded as equally sharing in His humiliation, an alternation of human and divine parts is substituted for the living unity of His person. His person and character are through and through supernatural; many of His words and works are miraculous; no normal evolution of "resident powers" in the human race according to the "inherent laws" of its history can account for Him; He comes to the world from the being and life of God. Nevertheless He was man, growing in mind, and heart, and will, limited in knowledge, liable to temptation, subject to emotion, strained in effort, dependent on, and submissive to God. We must take account of all the facts, and must not secure simplicity and consistency of view by the sacrifice of the completeness of our knowledge. The writer has attempted to do full justice to every feature and factor in the person of Christ, in the firm conviction that only as with candour and reverence we seek the whole truth, do we honour Him who is the Living Truth, and gives the Spirit of Truth.

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