

# LIFE AND TIMES OF JESUS

AS RELATED BY

THOMAS DIDYMUS

BY

JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE

AUTHOR OF "TEN GREAT RELIGIONS," "SELF-CULTURE," ETC.

*"Ὁὐ πρῶτον τὸ πνευματικόν, ἀλλὰ τὸ ψυχικόν· ἔπειτα τὸ πνευματικόν."*

"That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual."—1 Cor. xv. 46

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TO  
THE CHURCH OF THE DISCIPLES,  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS,  
MY FELLOW-STUDENTS. DURING MANY YEARS,  
OF  
*The Life of Jesus,*  
*THIS BOOK*  
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

## PREFACE.

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THE purpose of this book is to reproduce the times in which Jesus appeared, the characters who surrounded him, the opinions, beliefs, and prejudices of the Jewish sects and people. After this, Jesus himself comes before us, not as we now think of him, idealized by the reverence and worship of centuries, but as he may have appeared to the people of his own day, — a prophet, one full of divine power, yet a man like themselves. I have tried to show how some were attracted, and some repelled, by his claims and his character. Especially I have endeavored to enter into his own purpose and expectation, his own view of the Messiah and his kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

This book comprises the results of many years' study of the life of Jesus, and may be considered a brief commentary on the four Gospels.

The number of those who have written on the life of Jesus within a few years shows that the interest in this

<sup>1</sup> "I am persuaded that the Bible becomes ever more beautiful, the more it is understood; that is, the more we consider that every word which we apply to ourselves has had at first a particular, peculiar, immediate reference to certain special circumstances." — GOETHE, *Aus Makartens Archiv. W. Meister.*

great story is by no means exhausted. The variety of the interpretations indicates that the full secret of the phenomenon has not been discovered. The great range of opinions, which includes such writers as Strauss, Renan, Neander, Hase, Farrar, Geikie, Furness, and the Dutch critics, may allow room for another view of Jesus, which differs somewhat from them all. Most of these writers arrange themselves in two classes. One class stands on the church tradition and creed, and, assuming Jesus to have been mysteriously and absolutely divine, tries to harmonize his human life according to this assumption. The defect of this mode of treatment is, that it allows little critical freedom, and presents a character devoid of reality. Doubtful points are avoided, or touched very carefully, from the constant restraint of what may be called this theological prepossession.

The other class, taking its stand on the simple humanity of Jesus, easily falls into the opposite, or anti-theological prepossession. Its tendency is to strip off all mystery, to explain away all that seems inexplicable, to deny at once the possibility of whatever appears supernatural. But these elements form such an integral part of the narrative, that they can only be removed by reducing the historical value of the four Gospels to its minimum. The figure of Jesus which emerges from this treatment is often as unreal as the other, and has the additional disadvantage of being rather commonplace. When we read a critical narrative of the life of Jesus treated on this plan, we end by asking how it was, if he was no more than this, that he has ruled the religious thought of the most advanced races of men during so many centuries.

The method adopted in the present work is different from either of these. I begin by taking the position of those around Jesus, who must have regarded him as a remarkable man, — inspired by God indeed, a great prophet, but yet, like all preceding prophets, purely and simply human. Whatever else Jesus was, he was certainly a man. Keeping this firmly in view, I have endeavored to see how far we are carried up by the legitimate influence of the narrative. Not seeking to accept, nor hastening to deny, what is unintelligible, I have left much, as I have found it, veiled in the obscurity of tradition. When so many things meet us in daily life which we can neither accept nor reject, but must allow to remain unexplained, how can we think it possible to understand all that meets us in the story of a being so original and remarkable that his advent has created a new heaven and a new earth? Some of the seemingly supernatural events have been here interpreted according to natural law; but there remains a large amount of this element which I leave in the story as I find it.

The clew which I have followed is that contained in the saying of the apostle, which I have taken as a motto: "Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual." According to this plan, I have endeavored to place the reader and myself in the actual environment, looking at Jesus as he may have appeared to a liberal conservative like Nicodemus, a narrow zealot like Ben-Gamla, a man of the world like Pilate, a Jewish Epicurean, a Jewish Stoic, a noble Roman matron like the wife of Pilate, a sceptic like Thomas, and an ardent, enthusiastic Jewish

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woman like Miriam. I have also sought to give a picture of the time, the geography of the country, the customs of the synagogue and temple, the teaching of Philo, and the determined proselytism of the Pharisees. I present no list of the authorities from which my facts are derived,<sup>1</sup> but will merely say that the result of much study may be sometimes contained in the form given to a single sentence.

One advantage of putting these studies into a narrative form is, that the imagination is assisted in reproducing the times of Jesus by identifying ourselves with a single person, and following him through his experiences. Of course I cannot expect that this presentation of Jesus will satisfy all my readers. Those whose opinions are already formed in regard to the questions in dispute will naturally be often dissatisfied with my conclusions. But if those, who, like Thomas in this story, are in perplexity concerning Jesus, find him becoming more real, and brought nearer to them, by the present narrative, I shall be amply content.

Some will consider the portrait of Jesus in this work too purely human and natural, others as too supernatural. But, as I have said, I am unable to read the story without the conviction that Jesus possessed some extraordinary power over nature and life. In what it consisted, we are not called to decide. It is evident that these deeds were not

<sup>1</sup> Two exceptions I will make, — one in regard to the works on the gospel, by Dr. Furness of Philadelphia, which constitute, in my judgment, as valuable a contribution to this study as the present century has produced. The other is a book not widely known as yet, but containing some of the most original and profound investigations to be met with in any language, on the condition of the Jews and the Roman Empire at the coming of Christ. I refer to "Judaism in Rome," by my brother and friend, Professor Frederic Hildekoper of Meadville, Penn.

done to confute or confound opponents, but are a simple and natural outcome from the spirit of the Master.

If such a spiritual force was actually exercised, it would naturally cause other actions of a simpler order to be regarded as being also marvellous. Every new wonder creates immediately around it a penumbra of imaginary wonders; and I suppose some of the acts of Jesus which the disciples believed to be marvellous works, were not so. I have thus interpreted the feeding of the five thousand, the cursing of the fig-tree, the piece of money in the fish's mouth, etc. The last of these I have explained as a misunderstood proverbial expression of the fishermen of the lake. To show how easily a proverbial expression may be turned into a fact, I will add this incident. On the day when John Brown was executed in Virginia, and the whole North was filled with sadness, I heard two very ignorant men talking behind me in the railroad train. One asked the other, "What are they going to hang this Brown for?" The other answered, "I don't exactly know; but I heard tell that he set fire to a powder-magazine in Virginia." Some one had probably said in his hearing that Brown's course among the slaves was like bringing fire into a powder-magazine.

Some of the interpretations given here are, I think, new. The reason for driving out the money-changers, though it appears sufficiently obvious, I have not seen mentioned elsewhere. The simple way of reconciling John's paschal narrative with that of the synoptics, by the supposition of two suppers, and of a slight misplacement of events by the amanuensis of John, I have not found in the commentaries.

The difficulties which surround the history of the resurrection will probably be never wholly removed. In my narrative I have made much use of the results obtained by the penetrating insight of Dr. Furness. The main fact, that Jesus after his death came again to his disciples in visible form, and created a faith in immortality which transformed their whole being, seems to me undeniable. Without some such event, Christianity would have been buried forever in the Master's grave. The resurrection of Christ was the resurrection of Christianity. With all respect for those who believe that the apostles imagined they saw their Master, and that this self-illusion was the foundation on which the religion was built which converted Europe to faith in a Jewish Messiah, the supposition appears to me historically incredible. The house which is to stand must be founded on the rock of reality, not on the sand of delusion.

Since I first began this book, some years ago, several works of a somewhat similar kind have been printed. I have been obliged to deny myself the pleasure of reading these, — "Philo-Christus," for instance, — because I did not wish my own conception to be confused by the influence of a work written perhaps from a different point of view.

The reader will often find the results of modern scholarship embodied in the narrative, without reference to the sources from which they are derived, or the reasons by which they are supported. Thus, in the first chapter, the celestial phenomenon commonly spoken of as "the star in the east" is described as a conjunction of planets. This theory, first suggested by Kepler, indorsed by Dr. Ludwig Ideler, in his work on "Mathematical and Technical Chro-

nology," accepted by such orthodox commentators as Olshausen and Alford, seems the best explanation of the narration in Matthew. In "Smith's Dictionary of the Bible" it is stated by an astronomer that such a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn occurred three times between May and December B.C. 7. The astrologers of Persia, probably acquainted with the prophecies of Isaiah concerning a coming Jewish king, saw in these three planetary conjunctions a reason for believing his birth to be near at hand. The word translated "star" in Matthew is used in Greek for celestial meteors of various kinds.

It is sometimes urged as an argument against the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel, that it describes several visits made by Jesus to the feasts; while the synoptic Gospels give only one. But the reason for this is not far to seek. John's Gospel was partly intended to supply what had been omitted by the other evangelists. They mentioned only the last Passover, because only on that occasion did Jesus appear in a public character (John vii. 4, 10). He worked few wonders in Jerusalem, and those seem to have been purposely done in a way to deprive them of their miraculous aspect. These early visits were therefore omitted by the synoptics, who related events rather than conversations, but were reported by John because of the peculiar nature of the discussions. This I have tried to make clear in the course of the narrative.

In Miriam I have attempted to reproduce the character of those Jewish women who have been so conspicuous by their influence in the public life of Palestine and Rome. Such was Alexandra, who succeeded her husband Jannæus as

monarch of Judæa, a century before Christ, — a wise and energetic queen, during whose reign, says Josephus, the whole land was at rest. Such an one was that Herodias who wreaked her vengeance on John the Baptist, and whose influence on this very Herod Antipas was so great, that her ambition did the work which Miriam is represented as designing to do. She ruined him with Caligula, who deposed him, and banished him to Lyons. But in her case, too, the mixture of nobleness with wickedness appeared; for, refusing to accept the pardon of Caligula, she followed her husband into exile. Such a woman, also, was the beautiful and unhappy Mariamne, wife of Herod the Great, — the only person before whose influence his iron will gave way; and such another was Berenice, sister of King Agrippa, whose irresistible attractions at the court of Rome nearly compelled Titus to place a Jewish woman on the throne of the Roman Empire.

It is a year and a half since this work was completed. I have gone over it several times with care, but I cannot hope that some errors may not remain undetected. I trust they will not be important. The book has been prepared, not without a grave sense of responsibility, and with a sincere desire that it may help some open minds into a deeper faith in the common Master.

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JAMAICA PLAIN, MASS.

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