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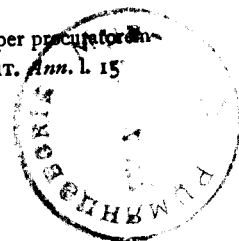
ECCE HOMO

A SURVEY OF

THE LIFE AND WORK OF JESUS CHRIST

By Seeley

'Auctor nominis ejus Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem  
pontium Pilatum supplicio affectus erat' TACIT. Ann. l. 15



No 3116

B. Kofebrunovsk.  
1894.

London  
MACMILLAN AND CO.  
AND NEW YORK  
1892

# PREFACE

TO THE  
FIFTH EDITION.

OBJECTIONS have been taken to the title of this book, as not exactly describing its purpose. Probably no short title that could have been devised would have escaped the same objections. If the writer could have conveyed his intention completely in his title, he might have spared his preface.

He is surprised to find his kind and cordial critic in *Macmillan's Magazine* quietly discussing the possibility that that preface may prove to have been a fiction. He fully agrees with those who declare that any such mystification on such a subject would be immoral.

One word he wishes to say about the charge of confident dogmatism which is brought against him. Dogmatism is no doubt used by superiors to inferiors, but it is also used in conversation between people who feel themselves perfectly equal. Expressions of modest deference, confessions of fallibility and imperfect knowledge, are wearisome between equals. The writer addresses throughout free inquirers like himself, and uses the tone which he would like others to adopt towards him. His book is not a book of authority, but

First Edition (8vo.) 1865 : reprinted Feb., March, April, June, August, 1866. New Edition (extra fcp. 8vo.) Feb. 1867 ; reprinted March 1867 ; 1868, 1869, 1873, 1874, 1876, 1877, 1879, 1881, 1883, 1885, 1886, 1888, 1890, 1892.

of inquiry and suggestion; it is intended not to close discussion, but to open it. It asks for consideration and, where it is wrong, for refutation. There may, however, be some who complain with more reason of dogmatism. There may be readers who belong to some school or sect with which the writer has little sympathy, and whose favourite opinions and interpretations he has no doubt in many cases entirely overlooked. Such readers will naturally be offended when they find what they regard as obviously true treated as obviously false. But they ought to consider that on such a subject as Christianity no one can write for all at once; every writer must suppose that he will be read only by those who will grant him some general postulates which are by no means self-evident; the reader who cannot grant these, ought to know that the book was not intended for him. If it had been necessary to prove every point which able and famous writers have denied, assuredly those for whom *Ecce Homo* was written would never have had patience to read it, nor indeed would the author have had patience to write it.

As this book contains no criticism of documents, some reviewers have supposed that the Author wrote without any criterion in his mind by which to test the veracity of the narratives from which he drew his conclusions, and that he simply assumed the truth of everything which struck his fancy or suited a preconceived theory. It may therefore be advisable to give here a short account of the method he pursued.

He was concerned with four writers who, in probable nearness to the events they record and means of acquiring

information, belong to the better class of historical witnesses, but whose veracity has been strongly impeached by critics, both on the ground of internal discrepancies and of the intrinsic improbability of their story. Out of these four writers he desired, not to extract a life of Christ, not to find out all that can be known about him, but to form such a rudimentary conception of his general character and objects as it may be possible to form while the vexed critical questions remain in abeyance. The detection of discrepancies in the documents establishes a certain degree of independence in them, and thus gives weight to their agreements; in particular, the wide divergence in tone and subject-matter of the Fourth Gospel from the other three affords a strong presumption in favour of all statements in which it coincides with them. The rudiment of certainty which the writer sought, he accordingly expected to find in the consent of all the witnesses. If the statements unanimously attested should prove numerous enough to afford any outline of Christ's life, however meagre, he proposed to rest content with this.

The following propositions are deduced from St. Mark, and the references are to that Gospel:—

1. Christ assumed a position of authority, different from that assumed by ordinary teachers: i. 22.
2. He claimed to be the Messiah: viii. 29, 30; xii. 6; xiv. 62.
3. Under this title he claimed an inexpressible personal rank and dignity: xii. 36, 37; xii. 6, 7.
4. He claimed the right to revise and give a free interpretation to the Mosaic Law: ii. 27; x. 4.

5. He claimed the power of forgiving sins : ii. 10.
6. He commanded a number of men to attach themselves to his person, ii. 14 : x. 21 ; to the society thus formed he gave special rules of life : x. 43, 44 ; made his name a bond of union among them : ix. 37-41 ; and contemplated the continuance of the society under the same conditions after his departure : xiii. 13.
7. He was believed by his followers to work miracles.
8. These miracles were principally miracles of healing.
9. The society he founded was gathered, in the first instance, from the Jews : vii. 27 ; but it was intended ultimately to embrace the Gentiles also : xiii. 10.
10. Though he assumed the character of King and Messiah, he declined to undertake the ordinary functions of kings : xii. 14.
11. He required from his disciples personal devotion, and the adoption of his example as their rule of life : viii. 34, 35 ; x. 45.
12. He spoke of a Holy Spirit as inspiring himself : iii. 20-30 ; and also as inspiring his followers : xiii. 11.
13. He spoke much of the importance of having good feelings as well as good deeds : vii. 15-23 ; ix. 50.
14. He demanded positive and, as it were, original acts of virtue passing beyond the routine of obligation : x. 21.
15. He denounced vehemently those whose morality was of an outward, mechanical kind, and he named them hypocrites : vii. 1-13.
16. By these denunciations, and by his claims to Messiah-

ship, he placed himself in deadly opposition to the Scribes and Pharisees : xii.

17. He required from his followers a spirit of devotion to the welfare of their fellow-creatures : ix. 35 ; xii. 31 ; and he declared himself to be actuated by the same spirit : x. 45.

18. Accordingly he went much among sick people, healing them, sometimes with strong signs of emotion : vii. 34.

19. He enjoined upon his followers a similar philanthropy : x. 21, 44-5 ; vi. 13.

20. He occupied himself also with curing moral disease, and particularly in the outcasts of society : ii. 16, 17.

21. He taught the forgiveness of injuries : xi. 25.

Now of these propositions, which have been deduced from St. Mark, it is to be observed, in the first place, that they are equally deducible, with scarcely the alteration of a word, from each of the other three Gospels. The only exception to this is that the author of the Fourth Gospel, who confines himself very much to generalities, does not speak definitely of the forgiveness of injuries or of the duty of relieving men's physical wants. On the other hand, he attests more strongly than the other Evangelists the prominence which was given, in Christ's moral teaching, to love. As forgiveness and philanthropy are among the most obvious manifestations of love, we may certainly say that St. John too, though not expressly, yet implicitly, attests that they were prescribed by Christ. In the next place, these propositions assert things about which the Evangelists were most unlikely to be mistaken. For, first, they are not isolated incidents which, however

generally received, might be traceable ultimately to a single witness. They refer to the habitual acts, to the customary words of Christ. If Christ claimed to be Messiah once, he did so often; if he denounced the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, he did so systematically. Secondly, they are public and conspicuous acts and words, which it would be difficult to falsify in the lifetime and within the knowledge of those who had been witnesses of them.

So far, therefore, these propositions are attested in the most complete way. But one objection may be made to the evidence. It may be said that it is exclusively Christian evidence, and, therefore, that it may have been corrupted by Christian prejudices in two principal points: Christ may have been simply a teacher, and the claim to Messiahship may have been an invention of his followers. Next, having represented him as the Messiah, they may have felt it necessary to represent him—also contrary to the truth—as working miracles.

But, indeed, that Christ did himself claim Messiahship cannot reasonably be doubted. His death is explicable on no other supposition. On this point assuredly his enemies and his followers were agreed. Nor can it be doubted, by the present writer at least, that he was believed in his lifetime, and not merely after his death, to work miracles. All those circumstances which have been represented as suspicious—his unwillingness to perform miracles in certain cases, the contempt he expressed for those whose faith depended exclusively upon them—are strong evidence that the miracles were at least no afterthoughts of the biographers,

for such circumstances were most unlikely to occur either in legend or in falsification. The fact that Christ appeared as a worker of miracles is the best attested fact in his whole biography, both by the absolute unanimity of all the witnesses, by the confirmatory circumstances just mentioned, and by countless other special confirmations of circumstances not likely to be invented, striking sayings inseparably connected with them, &c., in particular cases.

If, then, Christ did claim to be Messiah and to work miracles, it does not appear which of the above propositions Christian prejudice would have any interest or tendency to pervert. We have in them a perfectly consistent and, as it seems to the writer, an irrefragable outline of that part of Christ's life which is discussed in these pages. The writer has adopted it as his framework, and has not attempted to add to it anything fundamental, but has simply sought to find in the Gospels matter illustrative of it.

This illustrative matter which is drawn from particular Gospels rests, of course, on inferior evidence. But evidence inferior to the best may have very great probability, and there are certain obvious criteria by which this probability may be estimated. In the case of teachings, or maxims, the best criterion is their congruity with that general outline of Christ's system in which all the Evangelists agree. If they explain it and make it consistent, then, coming from witnesses not ill furnished with the means of acquiring true information, they will deserve to be received. Their genuineness is often confirmed by other circumstances. For example, the same thought, in itself agreeable to Christ's