Jesus in the Experience of Men

T. R. Glover

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T. R. GLOVER

Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, and Public Orator in the University. Author of "The Jesus of History"

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INTRODUCTION

One of the parables of Jesus turns on the ferment of leaven in a mass of meal—a vivid forecast of his own effect on the minds of men. He found a world full of established ideas, heirlooms of a great and progressive past, and the immediate effect of his coming was a struggle between inheritance and experience. "It was said to them of old time; but I say unto you." The minds of most of us are like palimpsests written over and over again; here the latest notion stands out in the newest script, but between the letters are to be found traces of ideas much older, obliterated but legible; there the old is almost untouched, but the closer observer finds hints of a "later hand." Every great thinker sets men rewriting these palimpsests, and it is long before it is completely achieved; and often by that time a new story is being superimposed on the corrected page. Jesus had the same material to work upon as every great teacher, and his work was done in the same way, on the same terms, and with the same result in the clash of old and new. He has reacted on mankind, as we all know; he has transformed their ideas, blotted out old preconceptions and convictions, and through experience brought men to a new set of principles; but the process has been long and slow.

It is not as if men had really known at first what he meant and what his principles involved or, indeed, guessed how much his personality was to signify. It is easy to talk of his disciples taking the Christian message to the world; but when we begin to consider what this meant,

the task which they undertook is progressively realized to be of the hardest. A man has an entirely new experience, and he wishes to tell other men of it, but in what language? If he uses their language, it is inadequate for the new light and joy he has found; if he uses his own, recreated by the experience, it will be unintelligible. The dilemma is real but not final. One mind goes out to meet another; the listener can make nothing of the message, but he sees that there is something to be told; the bearing, the earnestness, the character of the messenger compel attention, and gradually the story is shared. But it is changed in being communicated. A poet has an inspiration; but if he is a great poet and writes great poetry, the eventual poem may be very different from the initial inspiration, even when it is full of it and expresses it—"like, but oh! how different!" The early Christian, in telling his story to the world, had to translate it; and translation, as all bred on Greek verse composition know, is a discipline in understanding; it means long and hard wrestling with the original, till it yields its real meaning. When the early Christian began to translate the story of Jesus into Greek (to say nothing of Latin, Syriac, or Armenian), he found out the gaps in his knowledge of the Greek vernacular and in his knowledge of Jesus; and by the time he had got his message into the new speech, his experience of Jesus was a larger one, and he had to tell of a greater Christ than he had expected. The leaven had done more than it seemed to be doing.

In one region and another of experience humanity has experimented with Jesus, constantly with new and unexpected results; it has explored him with anxiety; it has enjoyed him; and by exploring and enjoying him it has found more and more in him, and it has grown in the process.

Our task in this volume is primarily historical. We have to watch the Christian apostle and the Christian community brought face to face with new issues, intellectual, spiritual, and social, and doing their best to adjust old and new, often with a belief in the permanence of the old which experience does not sustain, frequently with a good deal of fear which proves not warranted. The ancient world had had a long religious experience; and if some of its standard ideas were as yet insufficiently examined, some of its gains were real and permanent. The Christian Gospel had to be re-examined in connection with them all.

The chief questions in religion for that ancient world were these:—Is God many or one? Is he just? Can man have peace with God and be sure of it? Is man's own personality secure, and for how long? We shall in turn have to discuss these questions and the older answers to them; to review the belief in spirits, that heirloom from animistic times, the philosophic foundation of polytheism; the problem of justice which haunts Greek thinkers from Theognis to Plato and beyond, and is the inspiring motive of Jewish apocalyptic; the conception of religion as safety, and of sacrifice as the supreme mode of religion, the assurance of God's acceptance. As all these ideas had been perpetually readjusted to growing experience of the nature of morality, a fuller discussion of sin and its forgiveness will properly follow, and with it a survey of the central question of the nature of God, and then of the problem of personal immortality, which occupied antiquity more and more, and at every stage depended on the conception of God dominant in the day. Lastly in this connection we must consider the attempt made, upon the background of these beliefs and of others, to explain the place of Christ in the universe which he was remodeling.

The second part of the book will deal more directly with the Christian society. There we shall have to review the efforts of the Church as it wrestles with its own problems of existence and effectiveness, as an institution. The personal relations which its members generally maintained with their Founder have been at every period decisive for the character of the Church at large; and we must make some endeavor to determine these relations, particularly when and where they are most intense and most controlling.

Finally, there are the broader effects of the ideas of Jesus upon human progress and the human spirit at large—sometimes the result of conscious and deliberate application of his principles to the affairs of men, perhaps as often the unconscious and unrecognized but none the less real outcome of men's affection for him.

Of course, as Aristotle said of his own *Ethics*, all this will be attempted "in outline and not in detail." A further difficulty will be that in all such study we have to isolate and to analyze ideas which were operative together and acted and reacted on one another; but that also is inevitable unless the reader will tolerate some repetition among the chapters. Finally, writer and reader here will have different rôles; the writer is to be the historian merely; it is for the reader to pass upon the evidence submitted and to be the theologian. In any case the work, if properly done by both writer and reader, should result in a new sense of the significance of Jesus in the experience of men.

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CHAPTER I

THE WAR WITH THE DAEMONS

I

A chance phrase will sometimes open a man's mind to us and show us a series of thoughts and ideas, of preconceptions and presuppositions, which surprise us. We have known him, intimately, too; and behind all lay this! It is with some such feeling that we find a whole world of strange background to the familiar thinking of St. Paul. He speaks of the wisdom of God, and then he adds, "which none of the princes of this world knew; for, had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory" (I Cor. 2: 8). It was not of Pontius Pilate and Herod that Paul was speaking, but of beings far more awful and far more powerful—thrones, dominions, principalities and powers, as he calls them elsewhere, "the world-rulers of this darkness," and at their head is "the prince of the power of the air."[1]

There had grown up in Jewish thought a great scheme of things which embodied a spirit world at war with God. Satan appears in the Old Testament, first of all as an accuser, and then as a maker of mischief. In the period between the main body of the Old Testament and the beginnings of the New, he had gained a greater prominence in men's thoughts and was now lord of the angels that fell, the great enemy of God,[2] "the Black

[1] See II Cor. 4:4; Eph. 3:2; Eph. 6:12; Col. 2:30; Gal. 4:3, 9. For principalities and powers and thrones, cf. II Enoch (Secrets) 20:1.

[2] Cf. Testament of Dan 5, "For I read in a book of Enoch the just, that the ruler of them is Satan." Cf. II Enoch (Secrets) 18:3. In I Enoch 65:6, the Satans appear in the plural.

One"[3]. God, with his purposes, and the forces that stand with him, is confronted by powers of evil, not scattered and desultory, but organized, ruled, and guided, well drilled, well led, and not unaware of God's designs. Again and again, through traitors in God's Kingdom, they got wind of the plans of God[4] and anticipated them, defeated them where they could, and fought a war of cunning and skill against God.[5]

The Jews did not stand alone in this conception of the spirit world. For the primitive peoples of today and for some who are not so primitive, the whole universe is full of daemon powers, more real than we can imagine. In an Indian temple I have seen women undergoing the process of having devils driven out of them. I have seen men of education bowing in these temples to avert the anger of such spirits. To the stranger from the West, with his modern science, they are nothing. To the ancient world they were more real than the men and women in the streets. All the daemons, devils, imps, and bogeys of popular belief, and all the gods of all the cults and all the religions were being reduced to one system; all were necessary in an orderly Cosmos. The later Greek philosophers explained through daemons the origin of evil, all the mystery and all the trouble of the world; and also the otherwise inexplicable gulf between the ultimate but unknowable One God and man. Gods lived beyond the atmosphere; daemons in the air; man on earth. So there was this daemon world proven; proven by all sickness and sin; proven by long belief, by the old religions; proven by the agreement of all mankind; proven by the assent of the best and most catholic of philosophic

[3] Barnabas 4:11.
[4] Cf. Enoch 16:3; not all the mysteries were known to the Watchers who fell.
[5] Cf. H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul and the Mystery Religions*, p. 121; *St. Paul and the Last Things*, pp. 324, 325; Clemen, *Primitive Christianity and Non-Jewish Sources*, pp. 83, 110.

thinkers. The Jew and the Christian were monotheists, but they too believed in the existence of daemons; they were face to face with this awful reality of the daemon world at war with God. Paul, it is quite clear, shared that belief, though he did not give to it the importance that other men gave.

Into that war, however, according to Paul, came a new force—the son of God, the Lord of Glory.[6] He battled with the powers of evil, and the battle went strangely, and they trapped him. Pilate and Herod were mere tools in the hands of these daemon powers, and they captured the Son of God. They crucified the Lord of Glory, and inflicted on God the most awful disaster that could be conceived. Then it turned out, says Paul, that, so far from defeating God's purposes, with all their skill and all their cunning, they had only played into the hands of God. For the defeat of Christ on the cross led to the Resurrection, to the triumph of God over the daemon powers, to captor made captive, death conquered, mankind set free; and all the glorious promises of spiritual liberty and of peace with God which the Christian world knows, and in which it rejoices.

In *Paradise Lost* we have this story in its most glorious form, but few of us accept it as history. All this dim world has passed from our minds; this tale of war in the spirit sphere is for us the merest mythology—"as much a dream as Milton's hierarchies," wrote John Keats.[7] Yet for St. Paul's contemporaries the permanence of the daemons was better assured than that of the Lord of Glory; their part and place in the world was proved and accepted, his was a doubtful Jewish assertion.[8]

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[6] The Lord of Glory is a name of God in I Enoch.

[7] Keats, Letter to Reynolds, August 25, 1819.

[8] Celsus, about A.D. 178, ridiculed this war of Satan with God; it was not "holy" to suggest that the greatest God had a rival; it was all a misunderstanding (quite in the Christian style) of Heraclitus' doctrine of strife. Celsus, however, accepted belief in daemons as natural and right.

Two problems here confront the historian. He has to explain how this phantasmagoria disappeared, and why, if this legend of war was the real Christian faith, or some vital part of it, the Lord of Glory has not gone with the rest of the *dramatis personae.* The identification of the Lord of Glory with the carpenter of Nazareth was surely the keystone of the Christian faith. If the one is dismissed as a figure in a fairy tale, what significance is left to the other? If we abandon Paul's "mythology" or turn it into "symbol," which is a politer way of doing the same thing, do we not, by this process of discarding, rob the Christian tradition and the Christian faith of its distinctive note and its real value?

If the affirmation of the writer to the Hebrews is to stand, "Jesus Christ, yesterday and today the same, and forever"; if the Church is to maintain that he has any permanence; we shall have to show what has been his real place in human experience, and to prove that the teaching of the Church about its Master rests not on abstract theory or mythology, but has foundations in what men have actually experienced of him. We shall have to treat such evidence as the Christian generations give us, exactly as we do all historical evidence—with the same sympathy, with the same caution, applying the same canons of judgment, using the same habits of doubt, looking in the same spirit of truthfulness for alternative explanations, careful always to limit our statements severely by our real knowledge.

The modern psychologist has, we may say, settled a great many questions suggested by the demonology of the past. He treats visions and voices, dual personality, conversion, and so forth, in a way foreign altogether to Paul's contemporaries, as to modern Roman Catholic, to Hindu and animist; and his conclusions so far appeal to the best trained minds as more satisfactory than the

ancient explanations. Will he go further and dispose of our religious experience as he has done of the long-established belief in daemons, in visions and theophanies? After all, the worst he can really do is to drive us to a closer study of fact, and our best friends can do us no better service. If he has disposed of the daemons and demigods, by whom the ancient thinker used to explain the existence of evil in the world, he has achieved a great stroke for mankind, it is true, in ridding men of the most paralyzing terrors it has known; but he has neither eliminated evil from the world we know, nor explained its presence there. A great dissension in Nature remains, however we express it or explain it. Carlyle used to worry over Emerson's inability to see the hand of the devil in human life. We know Carlyle's vocabulary and we interpret it; is not (in passing) the same procedure fair in reading the New Testament and the Christian Fathers? What lies behind their vocabulary? What facts of experience do their psychology and their demonology indicate? An explanation implies an experience. Pain is no less uncomfortable physically if we refuse the view that a daemon causes it, though, of course, a bacillus may perhaps be more easily treated. There remains just as much reality as before about the historical Jesus, and about the living and present Christ, whether we accept or reject the theories which the Church has spun on the subject; and the same applies to the theories of the Church's critics. Let us get to history.

II

After quoting the evidence of St. Paul for the widespread belief in daemons, it may seem a contradiction to suggest that in the New Testament the daemons are already beginning to recede from the first line of

interest; yet it is true. The writers of the Gospels refer all sorts of diseases to daemon-possession, as their contemporaries did. They stood with their neighbors in psychology, as was natural, and they shared their opinions in medicine. But while they keep the old language and the old beliefs, they are in possession of a principle which makes these of less consequence. For them the daemons and gods of polytheism are no longer very interesting. This is doubly clear. Paul puts it quite explicitly that they are defeated and are "coming to naught"; and the chief interest of the early Christian was manifestly in Jesus. The pagan gods were quickly disposed of; they were the angels that fell—mere daemons like the rest. But it was a longer time before the daemons, and their milder but legitimate descendants, the fairies, were definitely expelled for ever from the sphere of existence; but it was achieved, and by the New Testament principle of concentrating emphasis on Jesus Christ.

Thus Tatian, in the second century, proclaims with joy that "instead of daemons that deceive we have learnt one Master who deceiveth not." A modern Japanese, Uchimura, struck the same note; it was joyful news, "one God and not eight million." Tatian found it an attraction in Christianity that it is "monarchic" and "sets man free from ten thousand tyrants." Modern scholars are only beginning to realize the burden laid on the human mind by astrology and kindred impostures that came from the East, and with a jargon of philosophy and religion imposed themselves on the Roman world. Tatian knew it well enough and renounced the Greeks and their philosophy.[9] Philosophy had, in fact, by its surrender to polytheism and popular belief in daemons, strengthened their hold on men. The Gospel

[9] See Tatian, cc. 9, 16, 17.

did not in so many words deny their existence, but first degraded them and broke their hold, and at last annihilated them. By so doing it took terror out of men's souls, it made obscene and cruel rites needless, and greatly purified and sweetened life.

It is, however, important to note that there was a struggle. The Gospel could be made infinitely more palatable to many minds by bringing it into line with other religions, by blending with it religious and philosophical principles on which they rested, but which were vitally opposed to Christian history and Christian ideals. Such combinations appeared to clear up real philosophical difficulties and left men in a congenial atmosphere of magic and daemonic agencies. It does an historian's heart good to see the swinging blows with which Ignatius hammers a contemporary theory (*c.* A. D. 110) that made Jesus into a "daemon without a body." It is worth remembering that the Church always held to the real humanity of Christ; it was left for the heresies to spin endless genealogies of figments, metaphors, essences, and daemons. To some minds fancy always seems more able than truth to fire the imagination. Today it is hard for the Western thinker to make anything at all of the fragments of Gnostic theology and demonology that have come down to us, or to understand how anybody could ever have been interested in them. This is in itself an indication of what the absorbing interest in Jesus has done; and when one grasps that it stands between us and systems like the many forms of modern Hinduism and theosophy, one realizes anew the value of the historical Jesus.

At times it might seem as if the early Christian, like converts from heathenism today, really used the Gospel as a sort of super-magic. He employed "the Name that is above every name" to expel devils; and from an ex-

perience of my own in India I can understand why he did.[10] But that was by the way. What made that name of value was the Man who bore it, and the supreme interest of his character and story, his cross and resurrection, and yet more his teaching upon God and the intimate relation with God which was at last the only way of explaining him. If Jesus embodied God, if "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," if God was essentially like Jesus, then obviously, however real they might be, the daemons were irrelevant. As the daemon-world was at best a theory to explain phenomena possibly susceptible of other explanations, when Jesus made it irrelevant it ceased to be of interest and it died. This is shortening the story but not changing its meaning. If throughout the Middle Ages and even after the Reformation men believed in daemons and witches, as they did, the liberation of the human mind, which, as we shall see in a later chapter, belongs to the work of Christ, steadily drove the superstition into the background where it gradually died. Jesus is allied with the powers of the mind, and his Gospel naturally militates against "imaginations and every high thing that thrusts itself up," as Paul said.

III

That Jesus was historical differentiates him at once from the daemon "Rulers of the World" and their hosts. They were creatures of the fancy; and he was, in our ordinary sense of the word, real. They depended on a theory or a series of theories, and their dispositions and natures, when they had any, were mere matters of legend and fairy tale; but there was nothing authoritative,

[10] The most splendid illustration of this is the "Breastplate of Patrick," which in Mrs. Alexander's verse is in the *English Hymnal*. The original and a prose translation are in Whitley Stokes's *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*, Vol. I, p. 49.

nothing final, about them. Indeed there was nothing to begin on, such as a real person offers. A character guaranteed by history is something definite to work upon, however multiple it may be. It is possible to spend oneself with profit in the study of a real man; but if a daemon or a fairy has any lineaments at all, they are borrowed; and the peacock's feathers are more interesting on the peacock than on the jackdaw, especially when the jackdaw itself is a fable.

It was, as we have seen, an immense gain that Jesus was objective, that one could say of him, "This befel him and that definitely did not." The value of this will be brought out by even a very short investigation of Plutarch's method of handling legend or a little talk with a Hindu defending Hinduism. On the one side there is nothing but a series of dissolving views; with Jesus you are on the rock at once and have positive knowledge. To the troubled in heart it was intense relief to turn to a real figure with a real experience and no "perhaps" underlying all. But he is more than historically real; he is real in a deeper sense.

The first three gospels give records of a peculiar intimacy about his life, his character, his mind and personality. They yield a surprising amount of detail, vivid, various, and true. He can be known well, for while his sayings are often perplexing and stimulating, as he meant them to be, his meaning, his general drift, his fundamental ideas are extraordinarily clear. He has a reality, an intensity, that makes other men look beggarly in their outfit, starved in nature and parochial.

Here is a man of genius going quite beyond everyone else we know of that kind; a man of wide range in experience, of intuition, of acumen and instinct. He knows what his experience means and he does not miss it. He sees and feels things with an intensity that we do not