

## JESUS OF NAZARETH

### From a Jewish Point of View.

BY DR. K. KOHLER,  
Rabbi Temple Beth El, New York.

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THE following are the words of Josephus written about sixty years after the crucifixion, purged of later Christian interpolations:

"There was about this time a certain Jesus, a wise man, a performer of miraculous works, a teacher of men who love to follow Josephus' low new things [that is, in Jewish language, "wait Record. for the world's regeneration"], and he seduced many Jews and Gentiles. He was called the Christ [the Messiah]. And when Pilate, at the information of the principal men among us [that is, the high priests and the men of the Sanhedrin], had condemned him to the cross, those who were enticed by him could not cease to follow him. And so the tribe of the Christians, named thus after him, are not yet extinct in this day."

Little did the Jewish historian who wrote under the imperial roof of the Flavians imagine that this seducer Jesus was to grow into a personality by far eclipsing all the rulers on earth, and that this very name of Christ was to divide human history into two halves. To Josephus, John the Baptist, the originator of Christ Divides History into Two Halves. the Christian movement, appeared to be the much more important man. History gave its verdict otherwise. The young teacher of Nazareth by far overshadowed his master. Jesus in life and in death voiced the deepest longings of the human heart; therefore he became one of humanity's greatest.

The true history of Jesus is so wrapped up in myth, the story of his life told in the gospels so replete with contradictions, that it is rather difficult for the unbiased reader to arrive at the true historical facts. Still, as the clouds in the sky rather reveal than hide the orb of day rising in the East, so do the legends that gather around a popular hero disclose rather than obscure the presence of the great personality impressing the people with its power and charm. The beautiful tales about the things that happened around the lake of Galilee show that there was a spiritual daybreak in that dark corner of Judea of which official Judaism had failed to take sufficient cognizance. "The stone that the builders rejected has become the corner-stone" of a new world.

It is assumed by entire Christendom that the Jews in rejecting Jesus Christ brought upon themselves everlasting doom, the inexorable fate of exile, persecution, and hatred. This view is based upon the crucifixion story in the gospel records, which, while shielding the Roman, maligns the Jews, and is incompatible with the simple facts of the Jewish Law, the older Christian tradition, with common sense, and the established character of

Pontius Pilate, a very tiger in human shape. Surely the records of the trial demand a revision.

"DID THE JEWS REJECT CHRIST?" The very question implies a misconception of facts. Only Jews could confer upon the Galilean leader the title of *Messiah* or Christ. Did they expect "salvation from their enemies" (Luke I. 71; xxii. 36, 49) by the sword? Nearly all the followers of Jesus deserted his cause when their lives were imperiled and heavenly interference failed to come. Peter himself denied his master in the critical hour. What blame can be laid upon the rest of the Jews if they failed to believe in the re-risen Christ, whom but the few beheld in strange visions and amid ecstatic states of mind? The Jews still wait and pray, as did Jesus while walking on earth, for the kingdom of heaven to come and unite the children of God. And were Jesus, that zealous worker for the millennium of peace, on earth to-day, he would in all likelihood join his brethren in the flesh in prayer for the great Universal Church of the future, rather than accept the Church that bears his name as the best and highest fruitage of the divine spirit of man, as the final outcome of the great contest of all religions and races, for truth and justice, love and peace. Nay, more. True to the principle of the Hasidim or "pious ones," the Essenes, he would "rather be among the persecuted than among the persecutors, among the hated than among the haters, among the scoffed at than among the scoffers."

"DID THE JEWS REJECT CHRIST?" Most assuredly the weird and visionary figure of the dead and re-risen Christ, the crucified Messiah lifted up to the clouds there to become a partaker of God's nature, a metaphysical or mythological principle of the cosmos, the Jews did reject. They would not, let it cost what it may, surrender the doctrine of the unity and spirituality of God. Jesus the living man, the teacher and praiser of the tenderest love for God and man, the paragon of piety, humility, and self-surrender, whose very failings were born of overflowing goodness and sympathy with the afflicted, the Jews had no cause to reject. He was one of the best and truest sons of the Synagogue. Did he not say, "I have not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it"? What reason had the Jews for hating and persecuting him who had nothing of the rigidity of the schoolman, none of the pride of the philosopher and recluse, nor even the implacable zeal of the ancient prophet to excite the popular wrath; who came only to weep with the sorrowing, to lift up the downtrodden, to save and to heal? He was a man of the people; why should the people have raised the cry, "Crucify him!" against him whose only object in life was to bring home the message of God's love to the humblest of his children? Nor, in fact, was he the only one among the popular preachers of the time who in unsparring language and scathing satire exposed and castigated the abuses of the ruling priesthood, the worldly Sadducees, as well as the hypocrisy and false piety of some of the Pharisean doctors of the Law. His whole manner of teaching, the so-called Lord's Prayer, the Golden Rule, the code of ethics expounded for the elect ones in the Sermon on the Mount, no less than his miraculous cures, show him to have been one of the Essenes, a popular saint.

But he was more than an ordinary teacher and healer of men. He went to the very core of religion and laid



bare the depths of the human soul. As a veritable prophet, as a true religious genius, he disclaimed allegiance to any of the Pharisean schools and asked for no authority but that of the living voice within, while passing judgment on the Law, in order to raise life to a higher standard. He was a bold religious and social reformer, eager to regenerate Judaism. True, a large number of sayings were attributed to the dead master by his disciples which had been current in the schools. Still, the charm of true originality is felt in these utterances of his when the great realities of life, when the idea of Sabbath, the principle of parity, the value of a human soul, of woman, even of the abject sinner, are touched upon. None can read these parables and verdicts of the Nazarene, and not be thrilled with the joy of a truth unspelled before. There is wonderful music in the voice which stays an angry crowd, saying, "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone!" that speaks the words, "Be like children, and you are not far from the kingdom of God!"

"DID THE JEWS REJECT CHRIST?" Jesus anticipated a reign of perfect love, but centuries of hatred came. Could the Jews, victims of Christian intolerance, look with calmness and admiration upon Jesus, in whose What the Jews name all the atrocities were perpetrated? Did Reject. Still, the leading thinkers of Judaism willingly recognized that the founder of the Christian Church, as well as that of Islamism, was sent by Divine Providence to prepare the pagan world for the Messianic kingdom of truth and righteousness.

The Jew of to-day beholds in Jesus one of the highest types of humanity, an inspiring ideal of matchless beauty. While he lacks the element of stern justice expressed so forcibly in the Law and in the Old Testament characters, the firmness of self-assertion so necessary to the full development of manhood, all those social qualities which build up the home and society, industry and worldly progress, he is the unique exponent of the principle of redeeming love. His name as helper of the poor, as sympathizing friend of the fallen, as brother of every fellow-sufferer, as lover of man and redeemer of woman, has become the inspiration, the symbol, and the watchword for the world's greatest achievements in the field of benevolence. While continuing the work of the Synagogue, the Christian Church with the larger means at her disposal created those institutions of charity and redeeming love that accomplished wondrous things. The very sign of the cross has lent a new meaning, a holier pathos to suffering, sickness, and sin, so as to offer new practical solutions for the great problems of evil which fill the human heart with new joys of self-sacrificing love.

All this modern Judaism gladly acknowledges, reclaiming Jesus as one of its greatest sons. Still, it denies that one single man, or one church, No One Church Holds the Key to Many-Sided Truth. however broad, holds the key to many-sided truth. Like the sun's light reflected in the rainbow, so is God's majesty mirrored in the soul of man. Let us then wait for the time when all life's deepest mysteries will have been spelled, and to the ideals of sage and saint that of the seeker of all that is good, beautiful and true will have been joined; when Jew and Gentile, Synagogue and Church, will merge into the Church Universal, into the great city of humanity whose name is "God is there."