

Only a scholar can sift the results of scholarship. May more scholars give some of their time and ability to work of this kind, and thus make unnecessary the worthless material which is imposed upon the public.

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Jesus Christ before his Ministry. By PROFESSOR EDMOND STAPFER, D.D. Translated by Louise Seymour Houghton. New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons. 1896. 12mo, pp. xvi+182. Price \$1.25.

Dr. Stapfer, Professor in the Faculty of Protestant Theology at Paris, has become quite well known in this country by his earlier volume on *Palestine in the Time of Christ*, which has gone through three editions, and, though often inaccurate in details and sometimes mistaken in view or judgment, is perhaps still the best popular work in English upon the subject. The small volume now to be noticed is the first installment of a still larger undertaking, for Dr. Stapfer's plan includes three volumes upon Jesus Christ: His Person, His Authority, His Work. The second volume, upon *Jesus Christ during his Ministry*, is just announced by the publishers; and the third volume, upon *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, is well on in the course of preparation.

There is not much direct information to be had about Jesus during the thirty years which preceded his public ministry — the period our volume treats. What direct information we have is recorded in the first two chapters of Matthew and the first two of Luke. And one might have supposed that a writer on this period of Jesus' life would have devoted his book mainly to a presentation of this material, subjecting it to historical and literary criticism, and then constructing a fragmentary biography from it. But Dr. Stapfer distinctly states in his preface that this is not the way he has chosen: "Of the time which passed over him until his thirtieth year we know only so much as the evangelists Matthew and Luke have preserved for us. But it is not from the facts which they bring to light that I shall draw the pages which follow. To their touching narratives of the childhood of Jesus it seems to me that there is nothing to add or to subtract." Nor even to repeat? Then we part company entirely with direct information about Jesus' first thirty years. But still the whole inquiry is about these years — whence shall the author derive his facts? Let him tell: "I would fain say what must have been the life of Jesus until his

thirtieth year, by deducing from known facts some facts unknown, and permitting myself only to observe and relate." That is to say, with a knowledge of the Jewish people in the first century, and with a knowledge of Jesus as he appeared in his public ministry, the author will let his historical imagination produce a picture of Jesus. And what Dr. Stapfer has done is simply to describe what he conceives to have been the childhood and young manhood of the ideal Jewish boy of about A. D. 1 to 30. Now it may be conceded that there will be some probability about the results so obtained, but there is certainly no *reality* about them. Ideal lives are imagined rather than lived, and it is easy to conceive that Jesus' actual life before his ministry was very different in events and development from what we might suppose it would be. So when, cutting loose from all the direct information we possess, Dr. Stapfer undertakes to "say what must have been the life of Jesus until his thirtieth year," the question must be asked, How can he or anyone know what *must* have been? We can only say what may with more or less probability have been.

Therefore the most important part of the book is conjecture—plausible conjecture often, but only conjecture. The bulk of the book, however, consists of descriptions of places, customs, beliefs, and parties, about which a good deal is known and which the author presents in a very readable manner. The difference in this material between the present volume and that of his *Palestine in the Time of Christ* is simply that the historical information about the New Testament times there given impersonally is here associated with one concrete personal life. That which is historical in the present work, then, had already been given in the earlier one; and that which is new in the present work is imaginary and therefore of uncertain value.

A reviewer might enter at length into a criticism of Dr. Stapfer's various conjectures about the facts and experiences of Jesus until his thirtieth year, but this would only be to set conjecture against conjecture, a not very profitable proceeding. Many of his conjectures do not seem to the present reviewer probable, but it is not necessary to indicate these. The book is popularly useful in some degree, for it is entertaining and instructive for the common reader; but it cannot be regarded as a contribution to a fuller knowledge of the early life of Christ. It is to be hoped that the subsequent two volumes of the series will be of a better character, for we should like to put Dr. Stapfer's work upon the shelf with the other lives of Christ by Weiss, Beyschlag, Edersheim, and Andrews.

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