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Jesus, The Last Great
Initiate

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PREFACE

Criticism on the life of Jesus during the past century has been greatly to the fore. A complete account of this criticism will be found in the luminous sketch made by M. Sabatier, ¹ in which the entire history and present state of this investigation are given. Sufficient for the moment to refer to the two principal phases supplied by Strauss and Renan, with the object of determining the new point of view I now wish to offer.

Departing from the philosophical school of Hegel to ally himself with the critical and historical one of Bauer, Strauss, without denying the existence of Jesus, endeavored to prove that his life, as related in the Gospels, is a myth, a legend created by popular imagination, to meet the necessities of a rising Christianity, and in accordance with Old Testament prophecy. His position, a purely negative one, but which he defended with great skill and erudition, has been found true in certain details, but quite untenable in its entirety and essential elements. It has, in addition, the grave defect of explaining neither the character of Jesus

nor the origin of Christianity. The life of Jesus, according to Strauss, is a planetary system without a sun. One merit, however, must be granted this work, that of having transferred the problem from the ground of dogmatic theology to that of textual and historical criticism.

M. Renan's *Vie de Jesus* owes its brilliant success to its lofty, æsthetic, and literary qualities, as well as to the boldness of the writer, the first who dared make the life of the Christ a problem of human psychology. Has he solved the problem? After the dazzling success of the book, the general opinion of all serious critics has been in the negative. The Jesus of M. Renan begins his career as a gentle dreamer, an enthusiastic but simpleminded moralist; he ends it as a violent thaumaturgist, devoid of all idea of reality. "In spite of all the precautions of the historian," says M. Sabatier, "it is the march of a healthy mind in the direction of madness. The Christ of M. Renan hovers between the calculations of ambition and the dreams of a seer." The fact is that he becomes the Messiah without wishing—almost without knowing—it. He permits himself to be given this name merely to please the apostles and to fulfil the popular wish. It is not with so feeble a faith that a true prophet creates a new religion and changes the soul of the earth. The life of Jesus, according to M. Renan, is a planetary system illumined by a pallid sun devoid of vivifying magnetism or creative heat.

How did Jesus become the Messiah? That is the primordial question, the solution of which is essential to the right understanding of the Christ; it is also that before which M.

Renan hesitated and turned aside. M. Théodore Keim saw that this question must be boldly faced (*Das Leben Jesu*, Zürich, 1875, 3rd edition). His life of Jesus is the most remarkable that has appeared since M. Renan's. It throws on the question all the light given by texts and history esoterically interpreted. But the problem is not one capable of being solved without the aid of intuition and esoteric tradition.

It is by means of this esoteric light, the inner flame of all religions, the central truth of all fruitful philosophy, that I have attempted to reconstruct along its main lines, the life of Jesus, taking into account whatever previous historical criticism has hitherto cleared and prepared the ground. No need to define what I mean by the esoteric point of view, the synthesis of Religion and Science. Concerning the historical and relative value of the Gospels, I have taken the three synoptical Gospels (those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke) as a basis, and that of John as the arcanum of the esoteric teaching of the Christ, at the same time acknowledging the subsequent language and form, and the symbolical tendency of this Gospel.

All four Gospels, which should be mutually examined and verified, are equally authentic, though from different claims. Those of Matthew and Mark are precious gospels of letter and fact; therein are to be found the public deeds and words of the Christ. The gentle Luke affords a glimpse of the mystery-meaning beneath the poetical legend-veil; it is the Gospel of the Soul, of Woman, and of Love. Saint John unfolds these mysteries; in his Gospel are to be found

the inner depths of the doctrine, the secret teaching, the meaning of the promise, the esoteric reserve. Clement of Alexandria, one of the few Christian bishops who held the key to universal esoterism, rightly named it the Gospel of the Spirit. John has a profound insight of the transcendent truths revealed by the Master, and a great facility in presenting them. Accordingly, his symbol is the Eagle, whose wing cleaves the firmament, and whose flaming eye encompasses the depths of space.