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JESUS: MYTH OR HISTORY?

THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN COMPLETE
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JESUS: MYTH OR HISTORY?

By

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

Author of *The Bible and its Background*, *Morals in World History*, etc.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON was born at Durham in 1886. Educated at Winchester and Trinity College, Oxford, he entered the Civil Service in 1910. In 1915 he began to contribute to Rationalist and Socialist periodicals under the pen-name of "Robert Arch." In 1931 he left the Civil Service and began to write under his own name. Besides articles and pamphlets, he has written the following books : *Whence, Whither, and Why?* (as Robert Arch), *Philosophers on Holiday, The Bible and its Background* (2 vols.), and *Morals in World History.*

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FOREWORD

By the Education Act of 1944 Parliament has for the first time made it obligatory on the managers or governors of all publicly provided schools in England and Wales to give religious instruction. The syllabus of such instruction is drawn up by conferences in which the Churches control fifty per cent of the votes. Thus a legal obligation is now laid upon our Local Education Authorities to teach Christianity.

Christianity is the religion based on the Old and New Testaments. Christians are therefore committed to the belief that the world was created by a personal God; that God revealed himself to man, firstly through the Jewish law and prophets, and secondly and more especially by himself becoming man in the person of Jesus Christ; and that acceptance or rejection of this revelation makes a momentous difference to the eternal destiny of every man, woman, and child in the world. That is to say, the appearance on earth of Jesus Christ nineteen hundred years ago was a unique event, such as never happened before or since, and infinitely more important than the rise and fall of nations, the discoveries and inventions of science, or the weal or woe wrought by any war or any revolution.

Now it is safe to say that the majority of our people to-day believe no such thing. They are not, in the foregoing sense, Christians. They may believe in God as the result of early teaching, or because it seems to them the easiest way of accounting for things they do not understand; but they do not feel per-

sonally responsible to God as they would if they really believed the Christian creed. They feel responsible to their families, their neighbours, their workmates, their country, and maybe on grand occasions to mankind, but not to God. They may believe that Jesus Christ lived and taught a long time ago, because it is in the Bible and they have never heard it questioned; but they do not feel personally responsible for his sufferings as they would if they really believed the Christian doctrine of redemption. And they certainly do not believe that their destiny after death (if they have any) depends on their acceptance or rejection of all this. If they did, we should be a church-going nation; but it is notorious that we are not.

There is therefore a very wide gulf between the everyday beliefs of most men and women and the beliefs which the nation officially professes and orders to be taught to its children. Such a gap between theory and practice is not healthy. It is a symptom of something wrong. The professional advocates of religion tell us that what is wrong is the irreligion or indifference of the ordinary man and woman. If the professional advocates of religion displayed a notably greater degree of kindliness, honesty, or patriotism than the rest of us, we might believe them. But their superiority in these respects is not noticeable. And I suggest that what is wrong is not the attitude of the ordinary man and woman, but the hypocrisy of those who pose as leaders in Church and State.

Those leaders, as educated men, are perfectly aware that in the last century or so the Old and New Testaments, on which Christianity depends, have been submitted to criticism not only by Rationalists, but

by professional theologians as well, and that as a result there is not a theologian of repute to-day, outside the Catholic Church, who upholds the verbal inspiration or infallibility of either Testament. There is not a theologian of repute to-day, outside the Catholic Church, who maintains that Jesus Christ said and did everything which the four Gospels allege him to have said and done. There is not a theologian of repute to-day, outside the Catholic Church, who accepts Christianity in the sense in which the Churchmen of a hundred years ago accepted it.

Consider what this means. Professional theologians are not usually by disposition iconoclasts. On the contrary, they are usually in holy orders, and the tenure of their orders and of their chairs depends on their profession of Christianity in some shape or other. In this connection it is pertinent to quote the words of T. H. Huxley:—

> "Imagine that all our chairs of Astronomy had been founded in the fourteenth century, and that their incumbents were bound to sign Ptolemaic articles. In that case, with every respect for the efforts of persons thus hampered to attain and expound the truth, I think men of common sense would go elsewhere to learn astronomy. . . . It is extremely inexpedient that any subject which calls itself a science should be entrusted to teachers who are debarred from freely following out scientific methods to their legitimate conclusions, whatever those conclusions may be."[1]

If, then, the opinions of professional theologians on Biblical issues have altered in the last hundred

[1] T. H. Huxley, *Agnosticism and Christianity* (1889).

years, it is for the cogent reason that the progress of knowledge on the evolution of life and man, on the history of religions, and on the nature and composition of the Bible itself makes it impossible for any man who allows himself to think on the subject to adhere to the old positions.

It may be thought that those politicians who favour the obligatory teaching of Christianity in publicly provided schools at least intend that the interpretation placed upon it shall be up-to-date. Unfortunately this is not so. The conference of the Primrose League, in 1944, passed a resolution denouncing a course for teachers arranged by the Board of Education as "opposed to the accepted principles of Christianity." The reason for their wrath was apparently that some attempt had been made at this course to acquaint those who attended it with the bearing of modern scholarship on traditional doctrines. It would be interesting to know how many of those who passed this resolution themselves attend church. Probably their action was inspired less by a living faith in Christianity than by apprehension of the political consequences of its rejection. It is evident that, if they have their way, the religion taught in our publicly provided schools will not be that of the more enlightened theologians of the present day, but that of the pre-scientific past.

Rationalism stands for the application to religion of those scientific methods which have proved their efficacy in other fields of human enquiry. The Rationalist applies to the Old and New Testaments the same criteria of truth which he applies to any other books. If there is a Rationalist prejudice, it is a prejudice in favour of honesty.

The Rationalist sees in scientific method the only avenue to objective truth. He accepts the provisional picture of the world painted by modern astronomy, physics, biology, and anthropology. He sees no more evidence for the existence of the God of the Bible than for that of Zeus, Brahma, or Allah. He believes Christianity to be no more divine and no less human than Buddhism, Confucianism, or Islam. And, whatever may be his destiny after death (few Rationalists expect survival), he does not think it will be a penny the worse for his disbelieving in Christianity, nor that it would be a penny the better if he believed.

Did Jesus ever live? Is he a man who somehow became deified, or a god who somehow became humanized? It may seem to many that, once the Rationalist position is adopted, such questions as this are of only secondary importance. If Jesus was not God, does it matter much whether he lived or not? This is a reasonable question. Certainly the Rationalist has no stake in the matter. For the Christian, indeed, not only the historicity of Jesus but the substantial accuracy of the Gospel records is a vital issue. But once we drop the profession of Christianity in any shape or form, the question of the existence of Jesus, like that of the existence of Homer, Buddha, Arthur, William Tell, or Faustus, is an historical puzzle interesting to the curious, but fraught for us with no religious consequence of moment. As such I have tried to treat it in this book.

But I have cause to know that there are others who do not so treat it. A few years' work in the Rationalist movement led me to the disconcerting discovery that

the historicity of Jesus was a subject of bitter polemic among Rationalists themselves. The controversy between J. M. Robertson and F. C. Conybeare, for example, was conducted with none of the amenity customary among joint seekers after truth; and to this day there is no topic which raises such a hornet's nest as this in the columns of a Freethought journal. It was my fate once to engage in a debate in which I maintained, from a Rationalist point of view, the basic historicity of Jesus, and to be sarcastically advised afterwards by an obviously sincere " old stager " in the audience to join the Salvation Army !

The explanation of this bitterness is, I suppose, that the mythicist (i.e., the upholder of the theory that Jesus is a myth) feels that he is fighting under an unfair disadvantage. He has discovered, he thinks, an important truth which, once admitted, would knock the last nail into the coffin of the established religion. For that very reason he does not get fair play from professional theologians. They either meet him with a conspiracy of silence or, if that is impossible, treat him as an amateur whose lack of academic status (which they themselves owe in part to their " safe " views) robs his opinion of any value. Such treatment naturally makes the mythicist bellicose; and as against the professional theologian one cannot blame him. Unfortunately some mythicists are apt to be equally bellicose against fellow Rationalists from whom they are separated only by a secondary difference, and to see the cloven hoof of the " apologist " in any hypothesis of an historical Jesus, however shadowy, problematic, and useless to the real apologist such a hypothesis may be. This is the greater pity because, as we shall see, the

divergence between recent historicists and recent mythicists is not insurmountable. I do not, of course, wish to convey the impression that ill-temper is confined to one side, or that it characterizes all mythicists. The late Thomas Whittaker was a model controversialist; and the works of Paul Louis Couchoud are such a joy to read that their style alone must have made many converts. There is no reason why those of us who have no stake in the historicity of Jesus should get "short" with one another over an academic issue.

This book is intended, firstly, to familiarize beginners with the main arguments on both sides. The works of most of the controversialists mentioned are available in English and can be cordially recommended to any who care to tackle them. But many of them are long and expensive. Moreover, our impressions are bound to be one-sided unless we read both sides of the question; and few of us have time to do that. This is where I hope my book will be of use. In the interest of clarity I have begun with a survey of early Christian literature in so far as it bears on the subject under discussion. I have followed this by a rapid sketch of ancient and modern criticism prior to the development of the myth theory. Three chapters of the book are devoted to the myth theory and its critics. In this part I have tried conscientiously to bring out the strong points of each.

Secondly, this book is intended as an olive-branch. It is useless to pretend that I have not an opinion of my own. Accordingly in a final chapter I have temerariously attempted to mediate between the "fell, incensed points of mighty opposites." I think that the mythicist and the historicist have each

got hold of an important half-truth, and are usually too blinded by the light of that half-truth to do justice to each other's arguments. In synthesis lies reconciliation. I am well aware that, of all the sayings in the Gospels, that which promises a blessing to the peacemakers is the most ill-accredited by experience, and that I may after all succeed in pleasing nobody. But the effort seems to me worth making; and if it does no more than suggest a line for others to follow up, it will have been justified.

In conclusion, it may be as well to mention that I am not related in any way to the late J. M. Robertson. But I have derived both pleasure and profit from reading the works of that notable pioneer. If I have had to check his conclusions by those of others and to strike a balance between them, that in no way diminishes my debt. This book will have fulfilled its main function if it impels its readers to make the first-hand acquaintance of the scholars and thinkers whose views it attempts to summarize.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

CHRISTIAN TRADITION

THE tradition of the Christian Church concerning Jesus is based on the books of the New Testament, and more particularly on the four Gospels. An inquiry into the historicity of Jesus must therefore begin with a summary and analysis of the evidence contained in the New Testament. As the dates of the New Testament books are a matter of controversy, let us take them in the order in which they stand in our Bibles.

The Gospels. These four documents were in circulation in the Christian churches at latest by the second half of the second century A.D. Two of them at least are mentioned in the first half. How much earlier they may be is disputed. The four Gospels are traditionally attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The actual titles are ambiguous. Most Greek books denote the author's name by a plain genitive, e.g. the *Iliad* of Homer, the *Republic* of Plato. The Gospels, on the other hand, use the preposition *kata* (" *according to* Matthew," etc.), as if to avoid ascribing the actual documents before us to the traditional authors. With one exception (to be noted later) the Gospels contain no internal evidence of authorship. The traditional titles are used here for the sake of brevity only.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are so similar in language and structure that they are known as the Synoptic Gospels (Greek *synopsis*, " a common view "). Their evidence will be taken together.

The Synoptic Gospels are based on a common tradition, the nature of which can be ascertained simply by marking those passages which occur in all three. According to this tradition, shortly before the appearance of Jesus, an ascetic preacher, John the

Baptist, foretells the coming of a mighty one. Jesus comes, is baptized by John, and is declared by a voice from heaven to be the beloved Son of God. He retires to the wilderness for forty days and is tempted by the devil. He then appears in Galilee teaching in the synagogues and working miracles of healing, many of which are narrated in detail. He stills a storm on the lake of Galilee and causes demons to pass from a possessed man into a herd of swine. He angers the scribes and Pharisees by claiming, as "Son of Man," to forgive sins, associating with tax-gatherers and sinners, and setting aside the law of sabbath observance. He sends out twelve apostles on a healing and preaching mission. His enemies attribute his cures to demonic agency and are met by the query how Satan can cast out Satan, and by a declaration that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unpardonable. He refuses to work a miracle to order. Told that his mother and brothers are seeking him, he replies that his disciples are his family. His teaching takes the form of parables, which he interprets privately to his disciples, but not to others. Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee, hears of his reputation and wonders if John the Baptist has risen from the dead. Jesus feeds five thousand people on a few loaves and fishes. He asks his disciples whom they think him to be. Peter answers that Jesus is the Christ (or Messiah—the deliverer and king expected by Jewish patriots). Jesus charges his disciples to tell no one of this, and foretells that he will be rejected and killed, but will rise again in three days. He adds that some of those standing there will not die till they see the Messianic kingdom. Soon afterwards Jesus is seen by three disciples on a mountain, in shining raiment, talking with Moses and Elijah; and another voice from heaven proclaims him to be the Son of God. Later he again foretells his rejection. His disciples asking who of them will be the greatest, he takes a child and tells them that they will be judged by their behaviour to such—reinforcing

this later by saying that of such is the kingdom of God. A rich man asking for instruction is told to sell all that he has and give to the poor; and his refusal occasions the saying of Jesus about the camel and the needle's eye. Those who leave all and follow him are promised rewards both in this world and in the world to come. Jesus for a third time foretells his death and resurrection. Arriving near Jerusalem, he enters the city on an ass, is acclaimed as the coming king, and expels the traders from the temple. Various disputes with priests, Pharisees, and Sadducees, follow. To his disciples Jesus foretells the destruction of the temple and the return of the Son of Man before a generation has passed away. The priests decide to put Jesus to death. Judas, one of the twelve, undertakes to betray him for money. Jesus keeps the feast of the Passover with the twelve, tells them that one of them will betray him, and institutes the communion or eucharist. The same night he is arrested on the Mount of Olives. Brought before the Sanhedrin and asked if he is the Messiah, he answers that he is. Peter meanwhile thrice denies that he knows him. The Sanhedrin bring Jesus before Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judaea. Asked by Pilate whether he is king of the Jews, Jesus says that he is. Pilate, however, proposes to release him, but is overborne by the cries of the Jews and sentences him to crucifixion. He is crucified between two malefactors, a mock inscription on the cross proclaiming him king of the Jews. There is darkness over the land for three hours; and the veil of the temple is rent asunder. Joseph of Arimathaea asks Pilate for the body of Jesus and lays it in a rock tomb. The next day but one certain women visit the tomb at dawn and are told by an angel that Jesus is risen. Here the common tradition breaks off: the original ending of Mark is lost; and Matthew and Luke give completely different accounts of the sequel.

This common or " triple " tradition is reproduced in all three Synoptic Gospels in nearly identical

language, though with variations in the order of events. The order here given is that of Matthew. The prediction, twice repeated, that the Messianic kingdom will be set up before the generation that knew Jesus has passed away is remarkable.[1] On the face of it, it suggests that this narrative took shape while contemporaries of Jesus were still alive. Unless this can be otherwise explained, it is evidence for some historic basis to the tradition. The deity, pre-existence, and virgin birth of Jesus do not figure in the triple tradition. He is presented as a man proclaimed by God to be his Son, endowed with superhuman gifts and Messianic attributes, and miraculously raised from the dead, but not as himself God.

Matthew and Mark, in addition to the matter contained in the triple tradition, record the calling of the first disciples by the lake of Galilee, tell us that Jesus was a carpenter or a carpenter's son, name his mother and brothers, and mention his rejection in his native place. They give a circumstantial account of the execution of John the Baptist by Herod Antipas. They relate the miracle of Jesus walking on the water, the dispute with Pharisees about ceremonial washing, the healing of the daughter of a Phoenician woman, a second feeding of the multitude to the number of four thousand, the dispute with Pharisees on divorce, the answer to the sons of Zebedee concerning their place in the Messianic kingdom, the curse on the barren fig-tree, the anointing of Jesus in the house of Simon the leper, the mockery by the Roman soldiers, and the cry of Jesus on the cross: " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? " These features are either absent from Luke or recorded by him in a very different form and setting. They do not differ in kind from the material of the triple tradition.

Matthew and Luke have in common a mass of material not found in Mark and consisting chiefly of discourse. This material, known to critics as " Q,"

[1] Matth. xvi, 28; xxiv, 34. Mark ix, 1; xiii, 30. Luke ix, 27; xxi, 32.

includes some utterances of John the Baptist, the detailed story of the temptation, parts of the Sermon on the Mount, the healing of the centurion's servant, the reply to the Baptist's question: "Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?" the woe pronounced on Galilean cities, an invective against the Pharisees, a lament for Jerusalem, and some miscellaneous sayings and parables. The arrangement of this material differs considerably in Matthew and Luke. Unlike the triple tradition, Q represents Jesus as frequently addressing the multitude in plain language and by no means only in parables. The keynote of this teaching is the imminence of the Messianic kingdom, the necessity of a strict inward as well as outward observance of the Jewish law, and a denunciation of the Pharisees for hypocritical half-observance.

Mark and Luke have in common a few short episodes not found in Matthew—an exorcism at Capernaum, the incident of the widow's mite, and one or two more which do not call for closer notice here.

Matthew and Luke, unlike Mark, each give a genealogy of Jesus and an account of his birth and infancy. Each traces the descent of Jesus through Joseph back to David; but the intermediate names differ in the two Gospels. Nor are the stories internally consistent. Each records the virgin birth of Jesus, thereby rendering the genealogy pointless; but the particulars in the two birth stories are different, and neither writer seems to know the story told by the other. Luke, in spite of the passage about the virgin birth, later again and again refers to Joseph as the "father," and to Joseph and Mary as the "parents" of Jesus.[1]

Matthew and Luke each contain further blocks of narrative and discourse peculiar to themselves. The discourses peculiar to Matthew include parts of the Sermon on the Mount, parts of the invective against

[1] Luke ii, 27, 33, 41, 43, 48.

the Pharisees, and a good many parables, and are of the same general type as Q. The matter peculiar to Luke includes such items as the mission of the seventy and the parables of the good Samaritan and the prodigal son, and tend to emphasize the rejection of the Jews and the salvation of the Gentiles. Matthew and Luke give circumstantial accounts of the appearances of the risen Jesus; but, as already indicated, these differ completely in the two Gospels.

The Fourth Gospel gives an account of the life and teaching of Jesus utterly different from that in the Synoptic Gospels. His deity and pre-existence are affirmed in this Gospel alone. According to the Fourth Gospel the divine *Logos*, the Word or Reason of God which created the world, became flesh. No virgin birth is mentioned; but John the Baptist sees the Spirit [1] descending on Jesus and proclaims him to be the Son of God. Various disciples join Jesus on the strength of this testimony; and thenceforth he acts and speaks like a God. He puts his mother in her place with the words: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" He knows everything beforehand, announces that he has come down from heaven in order that those who believe in him may have eternal life, and upbraids the Jews as children of the devil because they regard his claim to godhead as blasphemous. He calls himself the bread of life, the light of the world, the resurrection and the life, the true vine. The discourses in the Fourth Gospel are all of this theological, self-glorificatory type, and have nothing in common with the ethical injunctions in the Synoptists. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus submits to arrest and death of his own choice and rises again by his own power. He then breathes the Holy Spirit into his disciples, and the story ends.

The Fourth Gospel, unlike the other three, claims to embody the evidence of an eyewitness—an unnamed

[1] *Pneuma*, the Greek word translated "spirit," means literally "breath" or "wind." The "Spirit" (*pneuma*) and "Word" (*logos*) of God are, in the Bible, synonymous.

" disciple whom Jesus loved," traditionally identified on insufficient grounds with John the son of Zebedee. In xxi, 24, we are told that the beloved disciple is the author of the Gospel. Chapter xxi, however, is generally held to be by a different and later hand than the rest of the Gospel. Nowhere else is the beloved disciple said to be the writer.

Acts of the Apostles. This work is a continuation of Luke. It opens with the ascent of the risen Jesus into heaven, and proceeds to relate the history of the early Church down to the arrival of Paul at Rome about A.D. 60. The Jesus of the Acts is the Jesus of the Synoptic tradition—" a man approved of God by mighty works and wonders and signs," [1] miraculously raised from the dead and thereby proved to be the Christ or Messiah foretold in the Old Testament. He is the Servant and Son of God, but nowhere in the Acts is he himself called God. The virgin birth is not referred to.

The Epistles. Thirteen reputed epistles of Paul, not all of which can be considered authentic, are included in the New Testament. In the form in which they have come down to us these epistles state that Jesus was " born of the seed of David according to the flesh," [2] that he had brothers,[3] that he instituted the eucharist,[4] was killed by the Jews,[5] was buried, rose again the third day, and appeared to a large number of persons, including Paul himself.[6] These passages, however, are in strong contrast to the general tone of the epistles. For otherwise Paul evinces no interest whatever in the life and teaching of Jesus. We read in Galatians that Paul, after his conversion, made no attempt to get into touch with the immediate disciples of Jesus, and let three years pass before he visited Peter. In this and other epistles Paul is said to have derived his gospel (including even the particulars of the institution of the eucharist) from no human in-

[1] Acts ii, 22.
[2] Rom. i, 3.
[3] 1 Cor. ix, 5; Gal. i, 19.
[4] 1 Cor. xi, 23–25.
[5] 1 Thess. ii, 14–15.
[6] 1 Cor. xv, 3–8.

formant, but from Jesus himself by personal revelation. The Jesus of the Pauline Epistles, like the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel, is a divine being, " through whom are all things, and we through him," [1] who was crucified and rose again for the salvation of believers. The contrast between the exalted status which Paul attributes to Jesus and his utter indifference to the teaching credited to Jesus in the Gospels is one of the puzzles of the New Testament and, as we shall see, one of the main arguments against the historicity of the Gospels and against the integrity of the epistles themselves.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, though attributed to Paul in our Bibles, is in fact anonymous. It belongs to a time when the Gospel story had begun to take shape. In it, as in the Pauline Epistles, Jesus is a divine being, " upholding all things by the word of his power," [2] who died for the sins of the human race and is now " a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." [3] The author refers to the temptation and the agony and says that Jesus was of the tribe of Judah.[4] But these references are very meagre; and the teaching of Jesus is not quoted at all.

Of the Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude probably none are authentic. James mentions Jesus only twice; 1 Peter refers to his sufferings in terms which suggest acquaintance with some form of Gospel story. Neither author writes as if he had any personal recollection of him. 2 Peter shows unmistakeable acquaintance with the Gospels; but this is the latest, and most certainly spurious, book of the New Testament. The Johannine Epistles are similar in style and outlook to the Fourth Gospel and are probably by the same author. Jude is too short, too late, and too obscure to have much evidential value.

Apocalypse of John. Jesus in the Apocalypse is a wholly superhuman being. The hieratic figure of chapter i is depicted in imagery drawn from Daniel

[1] 1 Cor. viii, 6. [2] Heb. i, 3.
[3] Heb. vi, 20. [4] Heb. ii, 18; v, 7–8; vii, 14.

and Ezekiel. The Lamb who symbolizes Jesus in later chapters is described as having been " slain from the foundation of the world." [1] The crucifixion is mentioned only once in the whole book. There is no other reference to the Gospel story. This does not prove that no Gospel existed in A.D. 93–96, when the Apocalypse was written; but it does suggest that no Gospel yet circulated in the churches of Asia Minor to which the Apocalypse was addressed.

Apocryphal Gospels. Besides our canonical Gospels there existed in the second century many which the Church eventually rejected as heretical or otherwise unedifying. They are of interest as evidence of the different forms of the Gospel story which competed for acceptance in the early Church. The *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, an Aramaic work, had no narrative of the birth or infancy of Jesus and was used by the Nazarenes or Ebionites of Syria, who denied his deity and regarded him merely as the greatest of the prophets. Only fragments of this Gospel have been preserved. The *Book of James*, on the other hand, has come down to us complete. It expands the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke, gives the life-story of Mary, and, though uncanonical, has left its mark on Catholic legend. The *Gospel of Peter*, of which a fragment has been recovered, gives a curious account of the crucifixion and resurrection, in which Jesus feels no pain and rises from the dead overtopping the heavens in stature. The manufacture of apocryphal Gospels continued down to the fourth or fifth century.

Other Early Christian Writings. Possibly the oldest Christian document outside the New Testament is the Epistle of the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth, commonly known as the *First Epistle of Clement*, though the work itself nowhere names Clement as the author. The traditional date, A.D. 96, is supported by internal evidence and by most scholars. Like Paul and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews

[1] Rev. xiii, 8.

(which he quotes) the writer regards Jesus as a divine being, " the sceptre of the majesty of God," who died for the salvation of the world and was raised from the dead. At the same time he regards him as descended from Jacob " according to the flesh," and therefore as a human being. The writer quotes from some form of Gospel, but not from our existing Gospel text.

The so-called *Epistle of Barnabas* is difficult to date exactly; it may have been written within a few years of the foregoing, or may be as late as 120–130. Here, too, Jesus is the pre-existent Son of God, " Lord of the whole world," who became incarnate, was crucified by men, and rose from the dead for man's redemption. Both these writings are in the Pauline tradition.

Very different is the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, in its present form a Christian amplification of a Jewish ethical tract of uncertain date. The Christian portions are assigned to various dates between A.D. 80 and 160. They include a eucharistic formula so different from any based on the New Testament that it is worth giving in full:—

> " Now concerning the eucharist, thus give thanks: first concerning the cup: We thank thee, our Father, for the holy vine of David thy servant, which thou hast made known to us through Jesus thy servant; to thee be the glory for ever. And concerning the broken bread: We thank thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge which thou hast made known to us through Jesus thy servant; to thee be the glory for ever. Just as this broken bread was scattered over the hills and having been gathered together became one, so let thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom; for thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever."

It will be seen that the doctrine of the real presence of the body and blood of Jesus in the elements, so

repulsive to modern taste, is here conspicuously absent. Jesus is the Christ, i.e. Messiah, and " servant " of God, but not himself God. The *Teaching* quotes the Lord's Prayer and uses some form of Gospel; but to judge by the eucharistic formula this cannot have been any of our Gospels.[1]

The seven Ignatian Epistles, if genuine, belong to the last years of Trajan's reign—say 115–117: a minority of scholars put them as late as 150–175. In them we see the germs of a dogmatic creed. The deity of Jesus is repeatedly and emphatically affirmed; but his human existence is affirmed no less emphatically. He is " our God " and the " eternal Word "; yet he " was of the race of David, of the virgin Mary; was truly born, and did eat and drink; was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate; was truly crucified and dead; . . . was also truly raised from the dead by his Father," and gives his flesh to be eaten in the eucharist. Ignatius seems to be acquainted with Matthew and with one or more apocryphal Gospels now lost.

The *Epistle of Polycarp* is closely connected with the Ignatian Epistles, and its genuineness stands or falls with theirs. Its references to Jesus are mostly of the nature of quotations from New Testament books. We are told by Irenaeus that Polycarp had known John and other disciples of Jesus. It is therefore worth noting that the *Epistle of Polycarp* contains no mention of John and no personal information about Jesus whatever. If the statement of Irenaeus were correct, that would be a remarkable fact; but as we shall see later, there is reason to think that Irenaeus was mistaken.

Eusebius mentions that in the reign of Hadrian (117–138) a certain Quadratus wrote a defence of Christianity in which he claimed that some persons who had been healed or raised from the dead by

[1] A complete translation of the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* is given in an appendix to J. M. Robertson's *The Jesus Problem.*

Jesus had survived till his own time. Most of us will regard this as evidence of the credulity of Quadratus rather than of the historicity of the Gospel miracles.

Another apologist, Aristides, is assigned by Eusebius to the reign of Hadrian, but, from a Syriac translation of his work discovered in modern times, appears to have written in the next reign, that of Antoninus Pius (138–161). He describes Jesus in orthodox fashion as "the Son of God Most High" who "came down from heaven, and having been born of a Hebrew virgin, took flesh, . . . was pierced by the Jews, and after three days revived and went up to heaven." Here again we can see the Creed in the making.

The so-called *Second Epistle of Clement*, in reality not an epistle but a sermon of unknown authorship, belongs to the same period. The author describes Jesus as God, who "being first spirit, then became flesh," and as "Prince of immortality." He quotes indifferently from the Synoptic and from apocryphal Gospels.

Papias of Hierapolis, another writer of this period, is the first to refer to any of the Gospels under the names of their traditional authors. His work, entitled *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*, survives only in a few quotations. In one of these, preserved by Eusebius, Papias tells us that, preferring oral tradition to information from books, he took pains to find out from those who had known them "what Andrew, Peter, Philip, Thomas, James, John, Matthew, or any other of the Lord's disciples had said, and what Aristion and John the Elder, the Lord's disciples, were saying."[1] He quotes from "the elder" (probably John the Elder above-named) a statement that Mark was the interpreter of Peter and wrote down accurately, but not in order, what he

[1] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 39. The repetition of "the Lord's disciples" after "John the Elder" may be a corruption or interpolation. The change of tense shows that the two last-mentioned authorities belonged to a later generation.

remembered of Peter's account of the sayings and doings of Jesus. Papias also quotes from either this or another authority a statement that Matthew " collected the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best he could." His object is evidently to disparage the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, the one as badly arranged, the other as faultily translated, and to exalt in comparison the oral traditions which he himself had collected.

These extracts from Papias prove two things: firstly, that there lived in the early part of the second century persons who claimed to have known immediate disciples of Jesus and to transmit " oracles " derived from them; and secondly, that the Gospels (and *a fortiori* other books of the New Testament) were not yet regarded in the Church as inspired scripture. Papias felt free to criticize the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, and believed that he had access to more trustworthy oral accounts of the teaching of Jesus. The absence of any reference to the third and fourth Gospels shows that, if he knew them, he did not treat them as authoritative; for if he had done so Eusebius would not have failed to report it.

It does not follow of course that Papias's account of the composition of Mark and Matthew is correct. Mark is named in the New Testament only once as a companion of Peter, but repeatedly as a companion of Paul. It is unlikely that a devoted follower of Peter would have penned a work which repeatedly represents him and his fellow-disciples as dolts and cowards. Our Gospel of Matthew, again, is not a translation from Hebrew or Aramaic, though it may incorporate matter which is.

Still less does it follow that Papias's confidence in oral tradition was justified. We know from Irenaeus that one of the " oracles of the Lord " which Papias gleaned from this source was a prophecy that in days to come vineyards would have ten thousand shoots, each shoot ten thousand branches, each branch ten thousand sprigs, each sprig ten thousand clusters, each

cluster ten thousand grapes, and each grape would yield twenty-five measures of wine; that wheat, pasture, and other fruits of the earth would multiply in the same proportion; and that all animals would live together in peace. Now this vision of the regeneration of niggard nature differs only in detail from that in the *Apocalypse of Baruch*, a Jewish work written round about A.D. 70. We have here in fact one of many anonymous prophecies of a good time coming which circulated in the half-starved underworld of the Roman Empire in the first century A.D., and which a Jew could father on Baruch or a Christian on Jesus with equal assurance. If what we have of Papias is evidence for the historical existence of Jesus, it certainly makes it no easier to determine what he really taught.

Such Utopian prophecies caused the writings of Papias to fall out of fashion when Christianity became the religion of the Empire. Eusebius calls him "a man of very little intelligence." He had too much first-century Messianism about him to be viewed with favour at the courts of Constantine and his successors. His book was still extant at Constantinople in the ninth century; but copyists ceased to transcribe it, and to-day all we know of this *enfant terrible* of the early Church could be set down on a sheet of notepaper.

The *Shepherd* of Hermas, one of the few early Christian writings which have real literary merit, is said by the author of the Muratori Canon (180–200) to have been written about 140–155 by a brother of Pius, bishop of Rome. This is nearly contemporary testimony and can be accepted with more confidence than most statements about the authorship of early Christian literature. The book is a series of visions and parables intended to inculcate asceticism and steadfastness under persecution. To the author of the *Shepherd* the founder of Christianity is a man in whom the Spirit of God dwelt (as he may also dwell in others) and who by "labouring much and enduring

many toils" proved himself worthy to become the Son of God and to be the medium through which God's new law is communicated to men. Nothing is said of the crucifixion or resurrection. The author never refers to Old or New Testament books, does not use the name "Jesus" or "Christ" at all, and rather confusingly applies the phrase "Son of God" sometimes to the Holy Spirit, sometimes to the man in whom the Spirit dwelt, and sometimes to the law given to the world through him. That such a work should have been regarded by many as an inspired writing, and included in at least one MS. of the New Testament, indicates a greater freedom of thought in the early Church than might have been suspected.

Justin, who wrote his *Apology* about 150, is more orthodox. For him Jesus is "the very *Logos* himself, who took a form and became man, . . . the Son and the apostle of God the Father, and ruler of all things." At the same time Jesus is an historical figure who was "crucified under Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judaea in the reign of Tiberius Caesar, . . . died and rose again and ascended into heaven." Justin defends the union of these contradictory conceptions by appealing to the stories of pagan gods and to the practice of deifying emperors. The whole human race are partakers of *Logos* (reason), and those who live according to it are Christians, even if they are called atheists. Such were Socrates and Heraclitus among Greek philosophers; such were the worthies of the Old Testament who testified against false gods. Justin cites the Synoptic Gospels under the inexact title of "memoirs of the apostles," but does not refer to the Fourth Gospel, though its theology agrees with his own. Evidently it was not yet accepted as of apostolic authority.

The anonymous tract known as the *Epistle to Diognetus* is not much later than Justin and was once wrongly included among his works; but it lacks his tolerant attitude to pagan philosophy. The author treats Christ as a divine being sent to redeem mankind

from the evil world. The work is in the Pauline tradition and contains no reference to the Gospel story.

The last Christian writer who claims to preserve any living tradition of Jesus is Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons about 180 and author of a work *Against Heresies.* Irenaeus tells us that in his boyhood he knew Polycarp, who had known " John, the Lord's disciple." John, according to Irenaeus, lived until the reign of Trajan (98–117) and wrote the Fourth Gospel at Ephesus towards the end of his life. This supposed chain of oral tradition (Jesus—John—Polycarp—Irenaeus) bridging the first two centuries is one of the priceless assets of orthodoxy and is made the most of by defenders of the faith.

But the statements of Irenaeus raise peculiar difficulties. We have already seen that the *Epistle of Polycarp* neither mentions John nor displays any knowledge of Jesus independent of the New Testament —a remarkable fact, whether the epistle is genuine or not; for a forger, if he had known of such a chain of tradition, would surely have referred to it to lend authority to his work. Moreover Irenaeus, in quoting Papias, calls him a " hearer of John and companion of Polycarp." Now we know that Papias was not a hearer of John. He tells us himself, in a passage already quoted, that he had known none of the apostles, but had to discover their teaching from those who had known them. Irenaeus, then, was wrong about Papias, and he may well have been wrong about Polycarp. Most scholars now hold that the teacher of Polycarp was not John the apostle but a later John, the " elder " of that name mentioned by Papias, and that Irenaeus, who had known Polycarp only in boyhood, confused the two. This accounts for the silence of the *Epistle of Polycarp* about John and destroys the claim of Irenaeus to be regarded as a preserver of apostolic tradition. With it goes, incidentally, the only important evidence for the apostolic origin of the Fourth Gospel.

Irenaeus uses the authority of Polycarp to combat the Gnostic views of Marcion, Valentinus, and others on the subject of Jesus. He holds that Jesus lived nearly to the age of fifty, citing John viii, 57, in support of this opinion; and he attributes to him, on the authority of Papias, the prophecy of plenty already mentioned. Otherwise his views are based on the canonical Gospels. He is the earliest extant author who cites them all by name; and as against the Ebionites, Marcionites, and Valentinians, who recognized only one Gospel, he adduces rather puerile reasons why there should be four and no more. With him, in fact, Catholic Christianity hardens into orthodoxy.

Thus we find running through early Christianity to the time of Irenaeus two threads of tradition about Jesus. One, starting in the Pauline and Johannine writings, tells us of a God existent from the beginning of things who died and rose again for the salvation of mankind. The other, starting in the earliest strata of the Synoptic Gospels and notably in Q, tells us not of a God but of a man whom his followers regarded as a prophet of God. Most of the documents before us contain both elements in varying proportions. Orthodox Christianity fuses the two into one by affirming, in the words of the Athanasian Creed, that " our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds, and man, of the substance of his mother, born in the world; perfect God, and perfect man of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting; equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead, and inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood."

If we could regard the documents as authoritative they would point to some such formula. But we cannot regard the documents as authoritative. They contradict one another; and it is impossible for a scientifically trained brain to accept contradictory evidence. How the two traditions, that of the God and that of the man, arose and how they came to be fused into one is a problem which history has to solve.

CHAPTER II

ANCIENT CRITICISM

WHEN we ask what the ancient world had to say to Christianity it is surprising how little material we have on which to base an answer. To judge by appearances the contemporary pagan comment on the Gospel story was a silence more eloquent than words.

Gibbon states the case ironically, but correctly, in the famous fifteenth chapter of his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.*

> " How shall we excuse the supine inattention of the Pagan and philosophic world to those evidences which were represented by the hand of Omnipotence, not to their reason, but to their senses? During the age of Christ, of his apostles, and of their first disciples, the doctrine which they preached was confirmed by innumerable prodigies. The lame walked, the blind saw, the sick were healed, the dead were raised, daemons were expelled, and the laws of Nature were frequently suspended for the benefit of the church. But the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle, and, pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alterations in the moral or physical government of the world. Under the reign of Tiberius, the whole earth, or at least a celebrated province of the Roman empire, was involved in a preternatural darkness of three hours. Even this miraculous event, which ought to have excited the wonder, the curiosity, and the devotion of mankind, passed without notice in an age of science and history. It happened during the lifetime of Seneca and the elder Pliny, who must have experienced the immediate effects, or received the

earliest intelligence, of the prodigy. Each of these philosophers, in a laborious work, has recorded all the great phenomena of Nature, earthquakes, meteors, comets, and eclipses, which his indefatigable curiosity could collect. Both the one and the other have omitted to mention the greatest phenomenon to which the mortal eye has been witness since the creation of the globe."

Thallus. The irony of Gibbon would lose part of its edge if a conjecture put forward in recent years by Eisler and Goguel were well founded.[1] They point out that the ninth-century Byzantine chronicler, George Syncellus, quotes from a third-century Christian historian, Julius Africanus, a passage in which, referring to the darkness at the crucifixion, he says: "Thallus in the third book of his history calls this darkness an eclipse of the sun, but in my opinion he is wrong." The works of Thallus and Africanus are lost; and we do not know who Thallus was or when he wrote. He cannot be later than the second century, since he is referred to by Minucius Felix, who wrote late in that century or early in the third. According to the *Chronicle* of Eusebius, Thallus wrote a history in three books extending from the fall of Troy to the 167th Olympiad (112 B.C.). Eisler contends that, since Thallus is said to have referred to the darkness at the crucifixion, the date in Eusebius is corrupt and should be corrected to the 207th Olympiad (A.D. 49). This is possible, but not necessary; for Thallus may have mentioned the matter in a digression even if it did not fall within his period. Both Eisler and Goguel, following earlier authorities, identify Thallus with a Samaritan freedman of Tiberius, stated by Josephus, the Jewish historian, to have lent money to Herod Agrippa in A.D. 35. If this freedman were really Thallus the historian, we should have to admit, not indeed that the darkness at the crucifixion oc-

[1] Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*, pp. 297–299. Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, pp. 91–93, 185, 540.

curred, but that the story was current within a few years of the traditional date and that a contemporary historian thought it worth while to venture a natural explanation. This would be important evidence for the historicity of Jesus.

But the conclusion hangs on a chain of guesswork. The actual passage of Josephus, as we have it, does not even name the freedman, but calls him "another Samaritan."[1] The text is corrupt, and modern editors agree in amending *allos* ("another") to *Thallos*; but the name rests on inference. Even if we accept it, the identification with Thallus the historian is pure conjecture. Josephus mentions the freedman only as a financier; and financiers do not usually shine as men of letters. The date of the historian Thallus remains unknown; and until we know that he wrote in the first and not in the second century we can draw no conclusions from his comment on the Gospel story.

Josephus. The only extant first-century historian who deals with the period covered by the New Testament is Josephus. His *Jewish War*, written first in Aramaic and then translated into Greek, deals with Jewish history from 170 B.C. to A.D. 73; his *Jewish Antiquities*, written later in Greek, extends from the creation of the world to A.D. 66. The inquirer who goes to either book for light on Christian origins will be sadly disappointed. The *War* is silent on the subject. The *Antiquities* is worse than silent; for in the part dealing with the procuratorship of Pilate we find this unblushing interpolation:—

> "Now about this time there arose Jesus, a wise man, if indeed he may be called a man. For he was a doer of marvellous acts, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with delight. And he won over to himself many Jews and many also of the Greek nation. He was the Christ. And when on the indictment of the principal men

[1] Josephus, *Antiquities*, xviii, 6, 4.

among us Pilate had sentenced him to the cross, those who before had loved him did not cease to do so. For he appeared to them on the third day alive again, the divinely inspired prophets having foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And until now the race of Christians, so named from him, is not extinct." [1]

The forgery would not deceive a schoolboy. The writer of this passage is a Christian, not a Jew. Origen, who wrote in the third century, refers to Josephus as "not believing in Jesus as the Christ"; the passage, therefore, was not in his copy. We first meet it in the fourth century in a quotation by Eusebius, who gives it substantially as we have it.

It does not of course follow that Josephus gave no account of Jesus. We know that in the fourth and fifth centuries, when Christianity had become the religion of the Empire, the authorities ruthlessly hunted down and burnt writings hostile to the new religion. Any account of Jesus, therefore, which Josephus may have given, if unfavourable to Christianity, would have been censored at that time. We shall return to this subject later. Here we need only note that the extant text of Josephus is unhelpful.

Pliny. From 111 to 113 the younger Pliny was governor of Bithynia, in Asia Minor. His correspondence with the emperor Trajan includes a report on proceedings against the Christians. He describes the Christians as in the habit of meeting on a fixed day before dawn and singing a hymn to Christ as to a god, after which they separate and meet again later for a common meal. The letter, though often cited in controversy, neither proves nor disproves the historicity of Jesus. It shows that the Christians of Bithynia believed him to be God; but it does not tell us whether Pliny regarded him as a man or a myth.

Tacitus. The *Annals* of Tacitus, written about

[1] Josephus, *Antiquities*, xviii, 3, 3.

115–120, in their original form related the history of the Roman Empire from A.D. 14 to 68; but the portions covering the periods 29–31, 37–47, and 66–68 are now missing. Dealing with the persecution of the Christians by Nero in 64, Tacitus says:—

> "Christ, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate; and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular." [1]

An attempt was made in the last century to prove the whole *Annals* a forgery of the Renaissance; and some exponents of the myth theory still refer to them as suspect. To-day, however, no classical expert denies that the *Annals* are genuine. Apart from other considerations (coins and inscriptions discovered since the Renaissance, which confirm the *Annals* in detail) it is hard to see why a forger should have left so much of the record blank—especially the years 29–31, so interesting from a Christian or anti-Christian point of view. Further, the style of Tacitus is highly individual; and for any but the most accomplished Latinist to imitate it would be as difficult as for a literary adventurer to have forged Carlyle's *French Revolution.* Some critics who accept the main body of the *Annals* reject the section about the Neronian persecution, but they are few. Whether the section, if genuine, establishes the historicity of Jesus is another question, to which we shall return later.

Suetonius. About 120 Suetonius, a contemporary of Pliny and Tacitus and secretary to the emperor Hadrian, wrote the *Lives of the Caesars* from Julius to Domitian. He tells us that the emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because they "con-

[1] Tacitus, *Annals*, xv, 44.

stantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus." [1] The expulsion of the Jews by Claudius is mentioned in Acts xviii, 2, and seems to have occurred about A.D. 49. Suetonius also mentions Nero's punishment of the Christians, " a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition." [2] Both statements are very curt; and we have no means of knowing whether Suetonius connected the Chrestus of the one passage with the Christians of the other. In the Greek-speaking world the unfamiliar *Christos* (" anointed ") would easily be altered to *Chrestos* (" good "). Its derivative *Christiani* was in fact often written *Chrestiani*. Probably the Jewish riots under Claudius were led by an agitator who set up as Messiah (*Christos*), and Suetonius, who was not a very careful inquirer, assumed that the Christians of Nero's reign belonged to the same gang.

Jewish Reaction to Christianity. It would obviously be unfair to judge the Jewish attitude to Christianity by the utterances attributed to Jews in the New Testament. Generally speaking, the scribes and Pharisees of the Gospels, and especially of the Fourth Gospel, are mere foils to set off the central figure. Here and there, however, in the New Testament we find recorded a Jewish objection which the writers may have had reason to antedate, but hardly to invent. The Jews ascribe the miracles of Jesus to demonic agency; they refuse in any case to accept a crucified Messiah; they meet the resurrection story by retorting that the disciples stole the body. They do not deny the Gospel story *in toto*, but they explain its details in a contrary sense to the Christians.

Another authority for Jewish counter-propaganda is the Talmud. After the destruction of Jerusalem, when the fortunes of Jewry were at their lowest ebb, the rabbis set themselves the task of keeping their people together, and at the same time out of further mischief, by fixing the canon of the Old Testament and supplementing it by rules of conduct attributed to

[1] Suetonius, *Claudius*, xxv, 4. [2] Ibid., *Nero*, xvi, 2.

famous Jewish teachers. The collection so made, the *Mishnah* (" oral teaching "), was completed between 90 and 220, a period overlapping that of the growth and completion of the New Testament. A supplementary collection, the *Gemara* (" completion "), grew up between 220 and 500, the two together forming the *Talmud* (" learning " or " instruction ").

The *Mishnah* never refers to Jesus or to Christianity. The *Gemara* contains many references to both. The Jesus or Jehoshua ben-Pandira (or ben-Stada) of the *Gemara* is a shady character who in the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (103–78 B.C.)—different versions give different dates—learns magic in Egypt, leads the people astray, and is stoned to death and hanged at Lydda. He is also referred to as *ha-Nozri* (the Nazarene).

> " On the eve of the Passover Jesus the Nazarene was hung. During forty days a herald went before him crying aloud: ' He ought to be stoned because he practised magic, has led Israel astray and caused them to rise in rebellion. Let him who has something to say in his defence come forward and declare it.' But no one came forward, and he was hung on the eve of the Passover."

In view of the late date at which the *Gemara* was compiled, little value can be attached to this story. In its main features it is a Jewish attempt to give an anti-Christian twist to the Gospel tradition. The character of Jesus is blackened, his miracles are explained by magic, his trial is made out to have been regular and fair, and so forth. But we have independent evidence, as we shall see, that the name Pandira or Panthera goes back to the second century; and other details may be as old.

Another passage in the *Gemara* attributes to Rabbi Eliezer ben-Hyrcanus, who flourished about 70–130, the following statement:—

> " I once went on the upper street of Sepphoris; there I met one of the disciples of Jesus the Nazarene named Jacob of Kephar Sekhanjah, who said to me: 'In your law it is written: " Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore into the house of thy God." Is it permissible to use such hire to make therewith a privy for the high priest?' I did not know what to answer him. Then he said to me: 'This is what Jesus the Nazarene taught me: " She gathered it as the hire of a harlot, and they shall return it to the hire of a harlot: it has come from dirt, and to the place of dirt it shall go." ' "[1]

If the story attributed to Eliezer is authentic we have here evidence that he had personally met an immediate disciple of Jesus, and evidence therefore of the latter's historicity. The difficulty again is the silence of the *Mishnah* and the late date of the *Gemara*. But if the name Ben-Pandira goes back to the second century, so may this story. The reported saying, with its ribald mockery of the priesthood, may not be authentic, but it is unlikely to have been invented by orthodox Jews.

A specimen of second-century Jewish polemic is preserved in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, written some time after 135, in which Justin and Trypho, a Jewish rabbi of distinction, discuss the respective merits of Judaism and Christianity. The arguments which Justin puts into the mouth of Trypho, though fictitious, no doubt represent the attitude of the average rabbi of that day. Christians, says Trypho, are in a worse case than pagans. By pursuing pagan philosophy there is some possibility of rising to better things.

> " But to him who has deserted God and based his hopes on a man, what means of salvation are

[1] Cited by Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*, p. 593, and by Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, pp. 37–38. There are slight textual differences, but they do not affect the sense.

> left? . . . The Messiah, if he is born and exists anywhere, is unknown to others and even to himself and has no power until Elijah comes and anoints him and makes him manifest to all. You have accepted an idle report and fashioned a sort of Messiah for yourselves, and for his sake inconsiderately throw away your lives. . . . You put your trust in a mere crucified man, neglect God's commandments, and still hope to obtain his blessing. . . . This your so-called Messiah was inglorious and dishonoured to such a degree as to have fallen under the last curse which is recorded in the law of God; for he was crucified." [1]

Justin meets this attack by arguments from prophecy. In the course of the discussion he admits that some Christians regard Jesus as a man born of human parents. Trypho replies that such Christians are more rational than those who, like Justin, believe him to be God; but even so he cannot admit Jesus to be the Messiah, since he was not anointed by Elijah. Justin answers that the Spirit of God which inspired Elijah was also in John the Baptist. The argument proceeds with much bandying of prophetic texts, and the disputants part amicably.

The extract given above is sometimes cited by advocates of the myth theory as evidence that Trypho denied the historicity of Jesus. That, however, is clearly not its meaning. Trypho's case is not that Jesus did not live, but that he lacks the essential qualifications of a Messiah; not that Jesus is unknown, but that the real Messiah, when he comes, will be unknown until proclaimed by Elijah. The Jews for whom Trypho spoke expected Elijah, the Old Testament prophet who had never died but had ascended to heaven in a fiery chariot, to return at last and proclaim the future Messiah. They rejected Jesus because this condition had not been satisfied.

So far we have some evidence that the Jews of the

[1] Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 8, 10, 32.

second century regarded Jesus as an historical person, and none that they regarded him as a myth.

Celsus. Celsus, a Platonic philosopher, published, about 178, a work entitled *A True Word*, or, as we might say in English, *A Straight Talk to Christians.*[1] This work, like other anti-Christian writings, was destroyed when Christianity became the religion of the Empire. Origen, however, in 248, had published a reply in which the arguments, and to a great extent the very words, of Celsus were quoted for the purpose of refutation. This survives; and we are thereby able to get a good idea of the reaction of educated pagans to Christianity towards the end of the second century.

Celsus puts into the mouth of an imaginary Jew an attack on Jesus as a base-born adventurer, the son of a soldier Panthera, who pretended that he was virgin-born and, on the strength of magical powers acquired in Egypt, gave himself out to be God—a God, forsooth, who in infancy had to be smuggled away to Egypt to save his life! This shows that the Jewish story of Jesus ben-Pandira, who picked up magic in Egypt, was already current in the second century. Jesus, says the imaginary Jew, falsely pretended that a dove had descended on him and that a voice from heaven had proclaimed him to be the Son of God. The prophecies alleged to have foretold him refer to other men and other matters. He collected a following of riff-raff, tax-gatherers, sailors, and so forth, and wandered from place to place living by his wits. The Jew rejects the divinity of Jesus as he rejects that of such Greek heroes as Perseus and his like, though they were far more distinguished than Jesus. His miracles were wrought by magic: are we to think all magicians sons of God? The Gospels themselves speak of false Messiahs and false prophets showing signs and wonders and leading astray, if possible, even

[1] Origen, writing long after the time of Celsus, confuses him with an Epicurean philosopher of the same name. See Whittaker, *Metaphysics of Evolution*, p. 214.

the elect. Why should they be false and Jesus true? As to his resurrection, the only witnesses were a crazy woman and a handful of dreamers, wishful thinkers, or plain liars. Jesus should have appeared to his enemies, his judges, and the world in general; that would have been worth while.

Dropping the Jew and speaking now in his own person, Celsus dismisses the dispute as to the Messiahship of Jesus as puerile. The Christians, he says, are merely a sect of Jews, just as the Jews originally (he thinks) were merely a sect of Egyptians. The Christians deride the Egyptian cult of animals; but their own cult is no better (a reference, perhaps, to the Christian symbolization of Jesus as a lamb or a fish). They condemn the Greeks for deifying benefactors of mankind like Heracles and Asclepius; yet they deify Jesus, an executed malefactor. To hold that a God or Son of God ever appeared or could appear on earth in mortal form is, says Celsus, a degrading supposition; to hold that he appeared among the Jews, of all people in the world, is ludicrous into the bargain. Why do Christians, who take no account of the Greek, Egyptian, and other oracles, set such store by the Jewish prophets? Prophets of that sort are still found, says Celsus, in Phoenicia and Palestine; he has exposed some of them himself. If prophets foretold that God would suffer and die, so much the worse for them. The thing itself is unworthy of God and incredible. Christians, says Celsus, are gross materialists: they insist on a God of flesh and blood. The philosopher who wishes to see God will seek him with the mind's eye and leave wonder-workers severely alone. In honouring as God the founder of their sect, who appeared but lately, Christians are not even consistent monotheists.

With the other arguments of Celsus, able though they are, and with Origen's occasionally effective rejoinders, we are not concerned. Here we have only to note that Celsus, whether he speaks on his own behalf or impersonates an imaginary Jew, never ques-

tions the historicity of Jesus. He treats him as an impostor, a false prophet, a malefactor, but not as a myth. It is true that Celsus also treats Heracles and Asclepius as real men. But they are prehistoric, while the date assigned to Jesus was recent.

In handling non-Christian evidence on Christian origins we are handicapped by the drastic censorship to which all such writings were subjected after Christianity became the State religion. We have seen that the extant text of Josephus, except for one plain interpolation, tells us nothing of Christ or Christianity; that the portion of Tacitus covering the years to which the Gospel story relates is, by accident or design, missing; that the works of Celsus and other anti-Christian writers were systematically destroyed. We are left with one brief allusion in Tacitus; with a few passages in the Talmud which, being written in Hebrew or Aramaic, escaped the hand of the censor; and with such anti-Christian arguments as Christian writers chose to quote. The evidence shows that the opponents of Christianity, pagan and Jewish, had more to say on the subject of its origins than the paucity of their extant writings might suggest. They knew the Gospel story and rejected it. The ground of their rejection, however, was not that the subject of the story had never lived, but that the Christian accounts of his character and career were false and the Christian assertion of his divinity fraudulent.

CHAPTER III

MODERN CRITICISM

THROUGHOUT the Middle Ages Christianity was artificially protected from criticism. The writings of ancient critics had been deliberately made away with; and to call in question the tradition on which the Catholic Church based its claims to wealth and power was to place oneself outside the pale of society and to qualify for the dungeon and the stake. That there was clandestine unbelief is certain; but it was only when the temporal power of the Church had been broken by the Reformation and the Wars of Religion, and when the growing achievements of science had familiarized men's minds with the uniformity of nature, that it became possible systematically to apply rational tests to Christian dogma.

Reimarus. The first modern writer to bring scientific criticism to bear on the life of Jesus was Hermann Samuel Reimarus, professor of Oriental languages at Hamburg from 1727 to 1768. So unsafe was it even in the eighteenth century to dissent openly from the established creed that Reimarus dared not publish his researches in his lifetime, and they were first given to the world by Lessing after his death. Adopting the deistic standpoint of contemporary philosophers, Reimarus rejects miracles, criticizes the Bible freely, and sees in Jesus a Messianic pretender who attracted a following by the promise of material rewards and met his death in a struggle with the established authorities. His followers, to serve their own ambitions, stole the body, invented the story of his resurrection and future return, and founded the Church. The conclusions of Reimarus provoked a storm of anger and involved Lessing in considerable trouble; but they were insufficiently backed by

analysis of the documents, and, when the first fury had subsided, were allowed to fall into oblivion.[1]

Reimarus was succeeded by a number of writers who had little in common with him except a rejection of the miraculous and an interest in the natural explanation of Christian origins. Most of these writers held academic or other posts which rendered inexpedient any radical attack on the established religion. All proceeded on the assumption that if the miraculous element in the Gospels were discarded or explained away, the residuum could be used as the basis of an authentic life of Jesus, and that in this way Jesus could be presented as a moral teacher of unique significance for the modern world. Critics of this order were known as "Rationalists" in the now antiquated sense of rationalizers of the Gospel story. The term has long since acquired a broader and deeper meaning.

Strauss. The next step forward was taken in 1835, when David Friedrich Strauss published his *Life of Jesus.* Strauss abandoned all attempts to rationalize the Gospel story and treated it frankly as fiction put together in order to show that Jesus had fulfilled the Messianic predictions of the Old Testament prophets. Strauss held, however, to the historicity of Jesus as the figure round whom the stories were written. In the third edition of his work Strauss made considerable concessions to tradition, apparently in the hope of obtaining a professorship of theology at Zürich. When he did not obtain the appointment he withdrew the concessions. Such facts are worth noting as examples of the effect of economic pressure in imparting a conservative bias to academic opinion.

The Tübingen School. The wholesale rejection of the Gospel story by Strauss forced to the front a

[1] The poet Shelley seems to have been momentarily attracted to the theory of Reimarus. In a footnote to *Queen Mab* he says that he has "some reason to suspect that Jesus was an ambitious man, who aspired to the throne of Judaea." He subsequently abandoned the position.

question to which neither he nor his predecessors had paid sufficient attention—namely, that of the date and authorship of the various books of the New Testament. The pioneer in this inquiry, Ferdinand Christian Baur, professor of theology at Tübingen from 1826 to 1860, put his finger on a fact of which all later critics have had to take account—namely, that the documents prove the existence among the early Christians of two opposed parties, one (represented by the original apostles of Jesus) a purely Jewish sect, the other (represented by Paul) bent on a total breach with Judaism, and that the Catholic Church of history resulted from a fusion of the two. The dates assigned to the books of the New Testament by Baur and his followers (commonly known as the Tübingen school) are not now generally accepted; most of them are too late, and at least one (that of the Apocalypse) too early. But the struggle of parties in the early Church is a solid fact of the first historical importance. When two parties struggle for the control of a movement, the motives for the forgery and counter-forgery of documents are multiplied. Moreover, the sayings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels include many which, had they been known at the time, could have been quoted by the Jewish or the anti-Jewish party to establish its position. The fact that no such sayings are quoted in the Pauline Epistles or in the Apocalypse strongly suggests that they were not known to the authors of those documents, and therefore adversely affects the credibility of the Gospels.[1]

Renan. The most famous *Life of Jesus* written in modern times is that published in 1863 by the great French scholar, Ernest Renan. In Renan the Catholicism of his Breton ancestors is continually at loggerheads with the scientific scepticism of the modern

[1] Some have thought that Paul quotes Jesus in 1 Cor. vii, 10–11, and ix, 14. But the wording differs from that in the Gospels. Moreover, Paul insists that he received his doctrine, not by tradition from the original apostles, but by personal revelation.

world. Despite his personal loss of faith, he remained to the end of his life convinced of the necessity of supernatural religion to the mass of mankind, and venerated the legends in which he had himself ceased to believe. Consequently, while accepting the more important conclusions of the Tübingen school, he failed to apply them with any thoroughness to the matter in hand. The *Life of Jesus*, though rich in local colour and in literary charm, is a rationalization of the Gospel story on lines which were already obsolete when the book was written. The miracles are discarded or explained away, and the obviously fictitious discourses of the Fourth Gospel are set aside; but the rest of the narrative, on no ascertainable principle, does duty as history. We are left wondering why an amiable and ineffectual moralist, pushed by fanatical followers into more or less conscious imposture and meeting with a death which he had himself courted, should in Renan's estimation possess permanent significance for mankind.

Later Criticism. Since Renan, other lives of Jesus have been written. But later criticism has come more and more to the conclusion that the materials for such an undertaking do not exist. Even F. C. Conybeare, a stout defender of the historicity of Jesus, can say that "at the best . . . we can only hope to see Jesus . . . through the mist, ever thickening, of the opinions which the second and third generations of his followers formed of him." [1] The documentary analysis of the Gospels, indeed, can claim to have reached firm ground. Most critics are agreed that Mark, in substance, though not in the exact form in which we have him, is the oldest extant evangelist; that the common source (Q) of Matthew and Luke, not used by Mark, is as old or even older; that those parts of Matthew and Luke not derived from Mark or Q—e.g., the infancy narratives—are later accretions; and that the Fourth Gospel is theology, not history. But when we have

[1] Conybeare, *Myth, Magic, and Morals*, third edition, p. 140.

isolated Mark and Q from the rest of the material the question of their historical value remains.

According to all four Gospels the early home of Jesus was at Nazareth. Now no such town as Nazareth is mentioned in the Old Testament, in Josephus, or in the Talmud. The present town of that name can be traced back with certainty only to the fourth century A.D., when pilgrim traffic began. For its earlier existence our only authority is Christian tradition. The late T. K. Cheyne, Oxford theologian and Canon of Rochester, is of opinion that "we cannot perhaps venture to assert positively that there was a 'city called Nazareth' in Jesus' time."[1] Cheyne's view is vigorously contested by Goguel and is not by itself conclusive. There may have been a village of Nazareth too obscure to be noticed by Jewish writers; but as Matthew and Luke both call it a "city," that solution is hardly satisfactory.[2] Other considerations go to confirm Cheyne's doubts. The name "Nazarenes" or (more correctly) "Nazoraeans" is used in Acts xxiv, 5 (in the mouth of a Jew) to designate the Christians. "Nazarenes" (*nozrim*) is used in the Talmud in the same sense. The same word is used by the Fathers to denote a sect who in the early centuries of our era recognized Jesus as the Messiah, but continued to observe the Jewish law. It is usually assumed that the name "Nazarene" is derived from the place Nazareth. But no other instance is known of a sect being called after the home of its founder. No one calls Moslems "Meccans" or Lutherans "Eislebeners."[3] More remarkable still, the Mandaeans, a sect in Iraq who revere John the Baptist and reject Jesus as a false prophet, nevertheless call themselves "Nazoraeans" (*Nasoraye*). This makes it difficult to derive the name from the traditional home of Jesus. It is more probably

[1] Cheyne, *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, article "Nazareth."
[2] Matth. ii, 23; Luke i, 26; ii, 39; iv, 29.
[3] "Plymouth Brethren" is no exception. Plymouth is the birthplace of the sect, not of its founder.

derived from a Hebrew word *nazar*, meaning to " keep " or " observe," and signifies the observers of some religious usage.[1] " Nazarene " was thus an appropriate name for a sect of Jews who, as Jesus is said to have done in the Sermon on the Mount, claimed not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it, and set up a standard of righteousness exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees. It was a misnomer when applied to the followers of Paul, who rejected the Jewish law; but by a natural process the Jews extended the name to all Christians.[2] It was only to be expected that Greek-speaking Christians, unfamiliar with Hebrew and with the topography of Palestine, should trace the word " Nazarene " to an imaginary town of Nazareth, which thus found its way into the Gospels and, when holy places had become a vested interest, achieved objective existence.

A further difficulty relates to the teaching ascribed to Jesus. All three Synoptic Gospels stress its novelty and originality: " they were astonished at his teaching; for he taught them as one having authority." [3] According to Mark this novel and original teaching consists wholly of parables, and is cast in that form on purpose to conceal its meaning, " that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand." [4] Only disciples are let into the secret. The parables reported by Mark relate to the " kingdom of God "; but it is to be noted that while we are often told what the kingdom of God is *like*, we are never told what it *is*. On exceptional occasions, when challenged by the Pharisees, Jesus combats their teaching on such matters as the sabbath, the ceremonial law, and divorce; but for the most

[1] Or " keepers of secrets." See Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*, pp. 232–235.

[2] In the same way the word " Puritan," originally applied to the Calvinists in the Church of England, came in the seventeenth century to denote the whole Roundhead party, including even Freethinkers like Marten and Sidney.

[3] Matth. vii, 28–29; Mark i, 22; Luke iv, 32.

[4] Mark iv, 12.

part his teaching is esoteric. We are left wondering why audiences should have been astonished at its novelty if its meaning was deliberately concealed from them.

Matthew and Luke, above all in the passages derived from their common source Q, paint a very different picture. Here Jesus does not confine himself to parables, but speaks in plain language to the multitude. This raises the question why these discourses are omitted by Mark. Are we to suppose that Mark was ignorant of such utterances as the Sermon on the Mount? Or, if he knew them, did he consider them of no importance? Or had he other reasons for the omission? If we nevertheless accept them as authentic, the question still arises why they should have struck their hearers as novel or original. For to a very large extent the sayings of Jesus in Q agree almost to the letter with those of Jewish teachers before and after him. The doctrine of the fatherhood of God, often supposed to have been first taught by Jesus, is found in the Old Testament and is a commonplace of Judaism. The Lord's Prayer is a compilation of current Jewish prayers. The teaching attributed to Jesus in regard to renunciation of riches, to sexual abstinence and other forms of asceticism, was anticipated by the Essenes, who are said by Josephus to have rejected pleasures as evil, to have despised riches, to have had all things in common, to have carried nothing with them when they travelled, to have avoided oaths, and for the most part to have practised celibacy.[1] Such teaching would not have caused astonishment in first-century Palestine and would not have got its author into trouble. We are left with the question what the teaching really was which distinguished Jesus from his contemporaries.

That an action or saying of Jesus occurs in Mark or Q is no guarantee of its authenticity. A century of

[1] Josephus, *Jewish War*, ii, 8. De Quincey identified the Essenes with the early Christians; but the Essenes were indisputably older.

criticism has revolutionized the mode of approach to the problem. It is no longer possible, as it once was, to give the documents the benefit of the doubt. Our knowledge of the extent of forgery in the early Church, and of the abundant motives for it, forbids us to assume the authenticity of any disputable document. The modern critic cannot, like the older Rationalists, ask himself, "How much of the story do the laws of evidence compel me to reject?" and assume the authenticity of the residue. He asks himself, "How much of the story do the laws of evidence compel me to accept?" and uses the resultant nucleus, if any, as a criterion of the probability or otherwise of the remainder. Pursuing this method the Swiss theologian, Paul Schmiedel, drew up a list of passages which might serve as "foundation-pillars for a truly scientific life of Jesus." [1] These are passages which from the nature of their contents could not have been invented by anyone who believed Jesus to be God. E.g., in Mark the miraculous powers of Jesus are limited: he can do no "mighty work" where there is unbelief.[2] He repudiates the title "good master," since "none is good save one, even God." [3] He disclaims knowledge of the day and hour of the coming of the Son of Man.[4] On the cross he cries that God has forsaken him.[5] Matthew and Luke often modify or omit such features.[6] Both of them avoid any implication that Jesus's power is limited; Matthew eliminates his disclaimer of divine goodness; Luke omits his profession of ignorance of the day of the advent and his cry of despair from the cross. Schmiedel argues that such passages originally related to a human Jesus, but were altered or suppressed later in the interest of deification. They "prove that he really did exist, and that the Gospels contain at least

[1] Schmiedel, *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, article "Gospels."
[2] Mark vi, 5–6. [3] Mark x, 17–18.
[4] Mark xiii, 32.
[5] Mark xv, 34.
[6] Matth. xiii, 58; xix, 16–17; Luke xxiii, 46.

some absolutely trustworthy facts concerning him." [1] This progressive rehandling of the Gospels in the interest of the deification of Jesus is also stressed by Conybeare [2] and Goguel.[3] The historical Jesus, on this showing, was a faith-healer with a certain power over mental maladies, who made no pretence to divinity, but whom his followers eventually magnified into the superhuman figure portrayed in the Gospels, and who, hailed by them as the Messiah, was crucified by the Roman procurator as a political offender.

An important fact, of which those who affirm and those who deny the historicity of Jesus must alike take account, is that all the Synoptic Gospels make Jesus prophesy the coming of the Messianic kingdom before the generation addressed by him has passed away.[4] The prophecy was falsified; but the first Christians beyond question believed it. For twentieth-century critics this eschatological expectation is an essential key to the interpretation of primitive Christianity. Foremost among the exponents of this view is Alfred Firmin Loisy, an illustrious French scholar who started as a Catholic priest and, after a long struggle for freedom of historical inquiry within the Church, incurred the major excommunication in 1908. Loisy rejects all rationalizing attempts to turn Jesus into a modern liberal Protestant born out of due time, and sees in him a person of whom little is certainly known except that he claimed to be the Messiah, that for this claim he was denounced by the Jewish priests and crucified by Pilate, and that the record of his life and death was remodelled and interpolated by the evangelists in the interest of Pauline theology. Thus the story of a last meal taken by Jesus with his disciples has been rewritten to make it square with the sacramental ritual of the Pauline churches. The

[1] Schmiedel, *op. cit.*

[2] Conybeare, *Myth, Magic, and Morals*, third edition, pp. 62–69, 170–171.

[3] Goguel, *Life of Jesus*, pp. 219–222.

[4] Matth. x, 23; xvi, 28; xxiv, 34; Mark ix, 1; xiii, 30; Luke ix, 27; xxi, 32.

body of Jesus was probably thrown into a pit with those of other executed persons: the burial by Joseph and the empty tomb were invented by the Gospel-makers in order to corroborate the Pauline dogma of a dead and risen Saviour. For Loisy, in fact, Jesus is not the founder of Christianity, but merely the match that set it alight. To other recent critics, such as Albert Schweitzer, Charles Guignebert, and Rudolf Bultmann, the one certainty in a debris of discredited legend is that a man of whose life little or nothing is known—who, according to Schweitzer, made no public claim to be the Messiah; who, according to Bultmann, did not even claim privately to be the Messiah; and whose real name, according to Guignebert, may not even have been Jesus—was crucified by Pilate and became the subject of a theological romance composed for their own needs by the next and following generations.

Thus the Jesus of the older Rationalists and of Renan—the moralist whose teaching was as significant for the nineteenth century as for the first—has melted into thin air. In so far as criticism holds to an historical Jesus at all, it has swung back to something like the position of Reimarus, corrected by the results of documentary analysis without which any solution must be arbitrary and unconvincing.

It is essential to a theory that it should explain the facts. Does this theory explain them? Yes and no. It explains some, but not all. It explains the historical setting of the Gospel story; the tradition of a human Jesus who suffered under Pontius Pilate; the claim of Papias to have met persons who had known immediate disciples of Jesus; the refusal of many early Christian writers (including the Synoptic evangelists and the authors of the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, the *Shepherd*, and Ebionite literature generally) to call him God; and the apparently unanimous assumption of the early critics of Christianity, so far as their attacks have been preserved, that they are dealing with a man and not a myth. If these facts stood

alone, a theory on the foregoing lines would suffice to explain them.

But there are other facts which such a theory does not explain. The Pauline Epistles, assigned by tradition to the middle of the first century, with their mystical Christ, " the power of God and the wisdom of God," [1] " the firstborn of all creation," [2] " through whom are all things, and we through him," [3] who " died and lived again that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living," [4] cannot be explained in terms of a human Jesus. Even if with Van Manen we assign the whole Pauline literature to the second century (an extreme and unlikely supposition) this is rather strong language to use of a man of flesh and blood who lived a hundred years before. Assuming with Loisy and others that the Gospels were edited in the interest of Pauline theology, whence came that theology? And why did the New Testament writers select, as a peg on which to hang their myth, a man who on the showing of the critics had nothing in common with the subject of the myth except the manner of his death? The difficulty of explaining Pauline Christianity in terms of a human Jesus is aggravated by the total silence of the Epistles on his career and teaching. The historical theory can account for the tradition of a human Jesus: it cannot account for the tradition of a divine Jesus. To account for that we must have recourse to another line of inquiry.

[1] 1 Cor. i, 24. [2] Col. i, 15.
[3] 1 Cor. viii, 6. [4] Rom. xiv, 9.

CHAPTER IV

THE MYTH THEORY

I.—THE PRE-CHRISTIAN JESUS

IN 1769, one year after the death of Reimarus, and before that critic's subversive researches had yet been given publicity by Lessing, the aged Voltaire was visited by "some disciples of Bolingbroke, more ingenious than learned," who concluded from the contradictory genealogies and the extravagances of the infancy narratives in the Gospels that no such person as Jesus had ever lived. The sage of Ferney had no bump of veneration in his composition and was not in the least shocked, but he found the arguments of his visitors unconvincing. In this way the myth theory made its first bow on the stage of history.

Volney and Dupuis. The French Revolution made it possible to publish such speculations in safety. In 1791 Volney, a distinguished traveller and member of the Constituent Assembly, published his *Ruins of Empires*, an historical essay in which he contended that all religions were essentially one and predicted their final union. He reduced the story of Jesus to a solar myth and untenably derived the name "Christ" from the Indian deity Krishna. In 1795 Charles François Dupuis, an ex-priest and member of the National Convention, published his *Origin of all Religions*, in which this line of interpretation was pushed further. The name of John the Baptist (*Ioannes*) is derived from the Babylonian fish-god Ea or Oannes; Jesus is born in a stable because, at the remote period when Dupuis supposes the solar myth to have originated, the sun at the winter solstice was in the sign of the Bull; Peter, the apostle to whom are given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, is the old Roman god Janus, who also carries keys; and so forth. Such

conjectures, in the absence of the necessary historical analysis, could never amount to proof. At most they suggested the probability of pagan influence at one stage or another in the evolution of the story. They left unanswered the important question why people who wanted to worship the sun should have gone to the trouble of founding a new religion when the old afforded such liberal facilities.

Bruno Bauer. In 1840, when Strauss's *Life of Jesus* was already before the world, Bruno Bauer, professor of theology at Bonn (not to be confounded with F. C. Baur of Tübingen), began the task of rewriting the history of early Christianity from a critical standpoint. His attempt almost at once cost him his professorial chair. Thus unmuzzled, he was led to more and more radical conclusions. Christianity, according to Bruno Bauer, arose at the beginning of the second century A.D. from an amalgamation of Stoicism and Judaism. Mark, the author of the earliest Gospel, wrote in the reign of Hadrian and deliberately invented Jesus as an ideal divine king in contrast to the Roman emperors. The invention caught on; and later evangelists embroidered it to suit the preconceptions of the early Christian community. The Pauline Epistles are second-century fabrications even later than the Gospels. The references in Tacitus and Suetonius to the existence of Christians in the first century must, on this theory, be set aside as forgeries.

Such theories as Bauer's invite the question why at a particular moment in the world's history certain men should not only have decided to start a new religion, but should have thought it necessary to base that religion on an elaborate apparatus of imaginary biography, faked history, and forged letters without even a minimum foundation in fact, and how such an edifice of forgery resting on nothing at all ever succeeded in winning credit. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that this problem began seriously to be faced. By that time the attempt to rewrite

the story of Jesus on liberal Protestant lines had visibly broken down and a fresh start was plainly necessary.

J. M. Robertson. The pioneer in this inquiry was John Mackinnon Robertson, beyond question the foremost British Rationalist of the early twentieth century. His first work on Christian origins, *Christianity and Mythology* (1900), appeared at a time when Frazer's *Golden Bough* had familiarized the educated public with the idea of the origin of religion in the magic ritual by which primitive man tried to assist natural processes and assure his food supply. Among other things Frazer had drawn attention to the widespread early practice of putting the tribal chief, or his substitute, to death in order to promote the fertility of the soil, and to the connection between that practice and many ancient myths in which the god (Osiris, Tammuz, Dionysus, etc.) is put to death and rises again to newness of life. Robertson points out the essential identity of the crucified and risen Jesus with these annually slain and resuscitated nature-gods, all of whom might be said in a sense to have died for their people and given them their flesh to eat and their blood to drink. He does not follow Volney in his mistake of deriving Christ from Krishna; but he points out that the Jesus and Krishna stories contain common features derived from myth-motives which were widespread in the ancient world. Each has to be saved in infancy from the murderous designs of a tyrant; Jesus is cradled in a manger, Krishna in a basket for winnowing corn; and so forth. The myth of a crucified god was found by Jesuit missionaries as far afield as Tibet in the seventeenth, and Nepal in the eighteenth, century.

Frazer, whose anthropological researches did so much to prepare the way for the myth theory, himself refused to accept it, alleging as reason the impossibility of explaining a great religious movement except by the influence of an extraordinary mind. To this Robertson legitimately replies that favouring social

conditions count for more than extraordinary minds in the spread of religions, and asks whether the Dionysiac cult in Greece, for example, presupposes an historic Dionysus. Even if extraordinary minds played a part in early Christian history, it does not follow that one of them was Jesus.

Robertson is prepared to concede the possibility of an historical Jesus—perhaps more than one—having contributed something to the Gospel story. "A teacher or teachers named Jesus, or several differently named teachers called Messiahs" (of whom many are on record) may have uttered some of the sayings in the Gospels.[1] The Jesus of the Talmud, who was stoned and hanged over a century before the traditional date of the crucifixion, may really have existed and have contributed something to the tradition.[2] An historical Jesus may have "preached a political doctrine subversive of the Roman rule, and . . . thereby met his death"; and Christian writers concerned to conciliate the Romans may have suppressed the facts.[3] Or a Galilean faith-healer with a local reputation may have been slain as a human sacrifice at some time of social tumult; and his story may have got mixed up with the myth.[4] The myth theory is not concerned to deny such a possibility. What the myth theory denies is that Christianity can be traced to a personal founder who taught as reported in the Gospels and was put to death in the circumstances there recorded. Josephus, save for one palpable interpolation, is silent on any such founder; and Tacitus, even if his evidence be taken as genuine (which Robertson declines to do), merely echoes the Christian tradition current in his day.

But how did a prehistoric nature-god, annually slain and raised from the dead that his people might

[1] J. M. Robertson, *Christianity and Mythology*, revised edition, p. 125.
[2] *Ibid*, pp. 363–364, 378–379.
[3] *The Historical Jesus*, p. 56.
[4] *Jesus and Judas*, pp. 205–207. *A Short History of Christianity*, Thinker's Library edition, pp. 15–16.

live, come to wear the disguise of a first-century Jew, put to death in Jerusalem on a political charge? Robertson has an answer to that question. The name "Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew "Joshua." The traditional founder of Christianity thus bears the same name as the legendary successor of Moses, who led Israel over Jordan into the promised land, and once, at the height of battle, caused the sun and moon to stand still until the people had avenged themselves on their enemies. Joshua is a mythical figure; and his name ("Jahveh is deliverance" or "Jahveh saves") was divine before it was human. Robertson postulates a primitive cult of Joshua, a Palestinian deity with affinities to Tammuz and the rest, the central feature of which was a spring festival at which a human victim in royal robes was killed and eaten that his body and blood might bring salvation to the community. Such a cult would naturally be suppressed when the Jews adopted monotheism; but it persisted in hole-and-corner fashion in Samaria, Galilee, and other regions on the fringe of Jewry, the human sacrifice being superseded in time by a sacramental meal followed by a mimic crucifixion and resurrection. This age-old rite, according to Robertson, gave rise to the myth of the passion and resurrection of Jesus.

Is there any evidence that such a cult existed? Robertson contends that there are traces even in the New Testament. In Mark ix, 38, the apostle John says to Jesus:—

> "Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name: and we forbade him, because he followed not with us."

Robertson infers that exorcists in Palestine used the name of Joshua or Jesus to work cures even before the advent of Christianity. In the Acts of the Apostles we read of "disciples" at Damascus before there is any mention of the gospel being preached there.

But the chief argument for the existence of a pre-

Christian cult of Joshua, or Jesus, is based on the story of Barabbas. In the Gospel accounts of the trial of Jesus we are told that it was the custom for the Roman procurator to release a prisoner, chosen by the people, at every passover. Pilate, desiring to save Jesus, proposes to the Jews that he shall be released in accordance with this custom; but the multitude demand instead the release of Barabbas—described by Mark and Luke as one of a band of insurgents who had committed murder; and Pilate reluctantly agrees. We have no independent evidence that there was any such custom as is described. It is unlikely that in the disturbed state of Palestine the Romans allowed the Jews this privilege, and most unlikely that a martinet like Pilate agreed to the release of such a desperado. The story is incredible; and we have to consider how it originated.

In certain MSS. known to Origen in the third century Matth. xxvii, 16–17, reads:—

> " And they had then a notable prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, ' Whom will ye that I release unto you? Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? ' "

Most of our MSS. omit " Jesus " before " Barabbas." But Robertson holds that the above was the original text and that the word " Jesus " was deleted later in order to avoid giving the bandit the same name as the Saviour. " Barabbas," in Aramaic, means " son of the father "; " Jesus Barabbas " therefore means " Jesus son of the Father." The key to the story, according to Robertson, lies in the fact that in many ancient rites of human sacrifice the son of a chief or king was sacrificed in place of his father. If the ancient cult of Joshua was of that nature, then, in accordance with the primitive convention which identifies the victim with the god, " Joshua son of the Father " would become the style and title of the god himself and would remain so when the sacrifice was

discontinued. When the story of the crucifixion of Jesus was first circulated, the Jews would point out that it was merely a rehash of the ancient and, in Jewish eyes, disreputable myth of Joshua son of the Father—Jesus Barabbas. To meet this objection the Christians inserted in the Gospels a story showing that *their* Jesus and Jesus Barabbas were two different people, and that in fact it was the Jews themselves who had saved Barabbas and sent the Messiah to his death.

In further support of the theory of a pre-Christian cult of Joshua, Robertson cites Philo's account of an incident at Alexandria when the Herodian prince Agrippa I, having been granted a kingdom by Caligula, passed through that city on his way to Palestine. To show their dislike of the Jews a Greek mob took a lunatic named Karabas, dressed him in a mock robe, crown, and sceptre, surrounded him with a mock court, and acclaimed him in Aramaic as "lord." Robertson supposes "Karabas" to be a copyist's error for "Barabbas," and sees here confirmation of the existence of a cult of Joshua son of the Father. In the Gospels, as is well known, Jesus is arrayed in a royal robe and mocked prior to crucifixion.

Robertson argues that the Gospel story of the passion and resurrection of Jesus is based on a ritual drama performed in connection with the cult of Joshua. The agony in Gethsemane, for example, is not even plausible as narrative, since the only witnesses (Peter, James, and John) are said to have been asleep: it is convincing only as a scene in a drama. Jesus is made to say to the three: "Sleep on now and take your rest"; and in the next breath: "Arise let us be going"—a strange juxtaposition, unless an exit and entrance have inadvertently been omitted.[1] Judas is paid by the priests to betray a man who was well known and who could have been arrested without any such assistance. In real life this would be unin-

[1] Mark xiv, 41–42. This argument falls to the ground if Couchoud's theory of a Latin original is accepted. The oldest Latin text has a different order in these verses. See next chapter.

telligible: as a dramatic touch it can be understood. The account in Matthew and Mark of the nocturnal trial and condemnation of Jesus by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (who apparently stand in no need of sleep and send out to search for witnesses in the middle of the night) is explicable only by the exigencies of dramatic action. Luke shows his greater sense of fitness by postponing the trial till morning.

In the first century A.D., then, according to Robertson, there existed in Palestine and in the Jewish " dispersion " a secret cult of great antiquity having as its central rite a sacrament symbolizing the death of a saviour-god, Joshua son of the Father. A ritual drama performed annually in the spring—the relic of a prehistoric human sacrifice—represented the passion and resurrection of Joshua. After the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the myth of the saviour-god became fused with the prevalent Jewish dream of a deliverer who should put an end to the existing world-order and set up the " kingdom of God." The cult became propagandist and admitted converts by baptism in the name of " Joshua the Messiah," which, translated into Greek, became *Iesous Christos*—Jesus Christ. At this stage the figure of Pilate was introduced into the ritual drama as a representative of the hated Romans, and the story acquired an historical setting. The Jewish rabbis banned the movement as heretical. As a result it addressed itself to the Gentiles and became more and more anti-Jewish. Propaganda required a literature. This was supplied partly by the amplification of existing Jewish books, as in the case of the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*; partly by theological tracts in epistolary form, such as those ascribed to Paul; and partly by casting the ritual drama of the crucifixion and resurrection into the narrative form which it assumes in the Gospels. The Gospel texts bear witness to a long struggle between the Jewish and anti-Jewish parties in the early Church, the anti-Jewish tendency finally predominating. In accordance with

this tendency every possible device is used to throw responsibility for the crucifixion on the Jews, and Pilate is as good as exonerated for his part in the affair. The character of Judas (*Ioudaios*, "Jew," abbreviated to *Ioudas*) was created, according to Robertson, as a personification of the hated nation that would not have Jesus for its Messiah.

Robertson, as we have seen, does not deny the possibility that some historical figure or figures may have contributed elements to the story of Jesus; but he denies that the Gospels afford any material for the biography of such a figure. He directs a heavy barrage against the "pillar" texts selected by Schmiedel as the nucleus of a life of Jesus. For example, Mark's statement that Jesus "could do no mighty work" where there was unbelief means, not that his power was limited, but that "where people were mostly too unbelieving to ask his aid, there were few cures to his credit." [1] It may have been invented to account for the fact that there was no recollection of Jesus in Galilee.[2] The saying, "Why callest thou me good? none is good save one, even God," need not be authentic: it may have been inserted to give effect to an Ebionite (i.e. human) view of Jesus. The Ebionite sect, according to Robertson, owed its existence, not to the persistence of a tradition of a human Jesus, but to an attempted compromise between the cult of Jesus and orthodox Judaism, which could admit no God but Jahveh.[3] But the saying in question need not bear this interpretation: it can be read equally well as a claim of Jesus to divinity, and was so read by the early Fathers.[4] The disclaimer by Jesus of knowledge of the day and hour of the advent implies subordination to the Father, but not common humanity. The cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" is no more in-

[1] *Christianity and Mythology*, revised edition, p. 444.
[2] *Jesus and Judas*, pp. 152–153.
[3] *Christianity and Mythology*, revised edition, pp. 443, 445.
[4] *Jesus and Judas*, pp. 147–148.

compatible with the divinity of the sufferer than is the "Jesus wept" of the Fourth Gospel. Moreover it is a quotation from Psalm xxii, 1, and has been held by theologians to suggest the hopeful close of that Psalm. Thus the mythicist allies himself with the theologian in defence of the essential deity of Jesus.

Certain subsidiary positions, though not essential to the main thesis, are used by Robertson to fortify it. The parents of Jesus, naturally, are as mythical as he. Mary, or Miriam, is identical with a primitive mother-goddess, other variants being the Syrian Myrrha, the Greek Maia, the Hindu Maya, and so forth—all derivatives of the ancient and familiar word "Ma." The Joseph of the Gospels is derived from the Joseph of Genesis, the mythical ancestor of the tribes of central Palestine, and is introduced into the story because the Samaritans expected a Messiah descended from Joseph. Jesus is born at Bethlehem because that place was an old centre of the worship of Tammuz, David himself on this theory being another variant of that god. Jesus is called "the carpenter's son," not because his father was a carpenter, but because he was the Son of God, the *demiourgos* or architect of the universe.

Matth. xxi, 1–7, in which Jesus is made to enter Jerusalem seated on an ass and a colt, is explained by most critics as a slavish adhesion on the part of the evangelist to the letter of the Messianic prophecy in Zech. ix, 9:—

> "Behold, thy king cometh unto thee . . .
> Lowly, and riding upon an ass,
> Even upon a colt the foal of an ass."

The ass is mentioned twice in Zechariah in accordance with the parallelism usual in Hebrew poetry, of which we have abundant examples in the Old Testament. To fulfil the prophecy Matthew makes Jesus ride on two asses. But Robertson rejects this explanation. To him the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on two asses stands for the passage of the sun at the summer solstice through the sign Cancer, repre-

sented by two asses in Babylonian and Greek mythology. He cites in evidence "a Gnostic gem representing an ass suckling its foal, with the figure of the crab (Cancer) above, and the inscription D.N. IHV.XPS: *Dominus Noster Jesus Christus*, with the addition, DEI FILIUS." [1]

The twelve apostles are mythical: the number is not mentioned in the Pauline Epistles except in 1 Cor. xv, 5, a late interpolation. The myth originated, according to Robertson, in the actual use of the term "apostle" to denote twelve functionaries delegated by the central Jewish authorities to collect money from the Jews of the dispersion. The extant *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* is admittedly based on a Jewish work. That work, according to Robertson, contained the teaching imparted by these twelve Jewish apostles to the ghettoes of the ancient world. When the *Teaching* was adopted and amplified for Christian use, its title (which Robertson holds to be original and therefore Jewish) gave rise to the story that Jesus had twelve apostles; and in due course lists were invented and inserted in the Gospels.

Robertson stresses the silence of the Pauline Epistles on the teaching of Jesus, the contradiction between the versions of the teaching in Mark and Q, the abundant parallels in the Old Testament and the Talmud to this allegedly unique teaching, and the absence of objective criteria of the authenticity of any part of it, as corroborations of his conclusion that the Gospels are "a baseless fabric of myths of action and myths of doctrine, leaving on scientific analysis 'not a wrack behind,' save the speechless crucified Messiah of Paul's propaganda, only in speculation identifiable with the remote and shadowy Jesus Ben Pandira of the Talmud, who may have died for some forgotten heresy a hundred years 'before Christ.'" [2]

Whittaker. Thomas Whittaker, a man of fine

[1] *Christianity and Mythology*, revised edition, p. 341. The inscription means "Our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God."
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 433.

scholarship, philosophical training, and literary power, put forward in 1904 a theory of Christian origins in which he accepts Robertson's thesis of a pre-Christian cult of Joshua. In support of this he adduces this passage from the Epistle of Jude:—

> "Now I desire to put you in remembrance, though ye know all things once for all, how that Jesus [or "the Lord"], having saved a people out of the land of Egypt, the second time destroyed them that believed not. And angels which kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation, he hath kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." [1]

This passage is fraught with difficulties. Some MSS. have "Jesus" in the first sentence, others have "the Lord"; and it is hard to say which is the older reading. Our Bibles have "the Lord," and lower down, without MS. authority, alter "the second time" to "afterward." If we accept the reading "Jesus" (as the more difficult and therefore less likely to have been arbitrarily inserted) the passage attributes the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and the punishment of the peccant angels to Jesus or (which is the same in Greek) to Joshua. There is difficulty here; for in the Old Testament the deliverance from Egypt is the work of Moses, not Joshua; and the meaning of "the second time" is far from clear. Whittaker, however, points out that punishing angels is the work of a god, and infers that we have evidence here of a pre-Christian cult of Joshua, or Jesus.

Whittaker also draws attention to the fact that one of the Sibylline Oracles, dating from about A.D. 80, explicitly identifies the Joshua of the Old Testament and the Jesus of the New:—

"Then shall one come again from heaven, an excellent hero,
He who spread his hands on a tree of beautiful fruitage,

[1] Jude 5, 6. The angels referred to are the "sons of God" in Genesis vi who fell in love with the "daughters of men" and begot the giants.

Best of the Hebrews all, who stayed the sun in his course once,
Bidding him stay with words that were fair and lips that were holy." [1]

Like Robertson, Whittaker traces the origin of Christianity to a fusion of the widespread cult of a saviour-god, by mystical union with whom men could attain immortality, and the Jewish expectation of a Messiah who would destroy the existing world-order. Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, there were no Christians in our sense of the word, but on the one hand the devotees of an Oriental saviour-cult, and on the other hand the Jewish Messianists. Unlike Robertson, Whittaker accepts Tacitus's account of the Neronian persecution as authentic; but he holds that the *Christiani* put to death by Nero were fanatical Jewish Messianists who could plausibly be accused of incendiarism. After the destruction of Jerusalem the worshippers of the saviour-god Jesus put forward the claim that their deity had actually appeared on earth as the Messiah and that the calamities of the Jews were the result of their rejection of him. Passages of the Old Testament such as Isaiah liii, with its references to the suffering servant of Jahveh, afforded a scriptural basis for this claim; and the fact that many would-be Messiahs had been executed by the Roman procurators of Judaea made it plausible enough for the purposes of propaganda. Hence the introduction of Pilate into the story. By the end of the first century the cult of Jesus, the suffering Messiah, was well established. Whittaker assigns the existing books of the New Testament, including the Pauline Epistles, wholly to the second century, but holds that nearly all were in existence by 150. He finds evidence for the theory of a primitive ritual drama in certain statements quoted by Origen from Celsus, in which the latter compares Christianity to the animal worship of the Egyptians and to the mummery of the Dionysiac mysteries. If the

[1] *Sibylline Oracles*, v, 256–259.

inference is valid the ritual drama must have continued to be performed until the second half of the second century, and it is surprising that we find no more definite reference to it in contemporary writers.

W. B. Smith. Since 1906 William Benjamin Smith, an American mathematician, has put forward a myth theory somewhat different from that of Robertson and Whittaker. Like them he holds that "Jesus" was a divine name before the Christian era. The Jesus of Smith, however, was not the god of a semi-pagan sacrificial cult, but was none other than Jahveh himself in his aspect of saviour. Smith finds support for his theory in the discovery of a papyrus containing the magic formula, "I adjure thee by the God of the Hebrews, Jesus." The date of this papyrus, however, is much disputed: some put it as early as the second century B.C., others as late as the third century A.D.; and its bearing on the theory of a pre-Christian Jesus obviously depends on its date. According to Smith the Jewish worshippers of Jahveh the Saviour, or Jesus, went by the name of Nazarenes, deriving from the Hebrew word *nazar*, to "keep" or "guard," and so signifying the worshippers of a saviour or guardian deity. We are in fact told by Epiphanius, a fourth-century writer against heresy, that there was a pre-Christian sect of "Nasaraeans." Smith holds that they were Gnostics—that is to say, their object was to save men from the errors and terrors of polytheism and bring them to the knowledge (*gnosis*) of the true God. They carried on a secret propaganda in various parts of the Mediterranean, including Palestine, Alexandria, and Ephesus, in all of which, in the first century, we find persons propagating "the things concerning Jesus." In Greek-speaking communities the name *Iesous* would suggest the idea of healing (*iasis*). As it was necessary to conceal the real nature of the propaganda from the imperial authorities, the literature of the sect took the form of allegories in which the true God was symbolized by a healer named Jesus and the false gods by the demons of disease and death.

The oldest of these allegories is the Gospel of Mark. Smith regards it as symbolism from beginning to end. Jesus says to his disciples:—

> " Unto you is given the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest haply they should turn again, and it should be forgiven them." [1]

That is, only adherents of the cult are to know its real nature; outsiders are to be bamboozled by allegory. But when the time is ripe the secret may be let out:—

> " For there is nothing hid, save that it should be manifested; neither was it made secret, but that it should come to light." [2]

The Gospel not only contains parables, but is itself one long parable. When we read that a woman with an issue of blood, " having heard the things concerning Jesus, came in the crowd behind, and touched his garment " [3] and was healed, we are to understand that the spiritually sick are healed by knowledge of the true God. When Jesus sends out the twelve with authority to cast out demons and heal the sick, it is a symbol of the mission of monotheists to convert the pagan world. When a rich man is told to sell all that he has and give to the poor, the meaning is that the Jews, who are rich in knowledge of the true God, are to impart that knowledge to the Gentiles. When Judas delivers Jesus into the hands of his enemies it is Mark's way of saying that the Jews have missed their opportunity and surrendered to the Gentiles the chance of establishing the worship of the true God. The epithet *Iscariot*, according to Smith, means, in Syriac, " the surrenderer." When Mark says that at the arrest of Jesus a certain young man clad only in a

[1] Mark iv, 11–12. [2] *Ibid.* 22. [3] *Ibid.* v, 25–34.

linen cloth escaped his captors by flying naked, he means that Jesus—that is to say, God—could not be arrested or crucified at all and that the story of the passion, like the rest of the Gospel, is symbolic.

The allegory, on Smith's showing, was signally misunderstood by those to whom it was addressed; for its result was to create a general belief in the historicity of Jesus and a demand for fuller information about his life and teaching. So far from the Gospels exhibiting the progressive deification of an originally human Jesus, Smith contends that they show the progressive humanization of a God. Matthew, the next evangelist after Mark, provides the God-man with a human genealogy, puts long discourses into his mouth, and makes his enemies reproach him as " a gluttonous man and a winebibber." Luke follows suit and adds new details. John goes further and provides Jesus with human friends and favourites. In this way a human Jesus was gradually created. But that an inner circle of Christian intellectuals knew the truth is shown, according to Smith, by the fact that late in the second or early in the third century Minucius Felix, writing a defence of Christianity in his dialogue *Octavius*, bases his whole case on the claims of monotheism and makes only one perfunctory allusion to Jesus. Like Robertson, but unlike Whittaker, Smith regards the reference of Tacitus to Christianity as a forgery.

Drews. Arthur Drews, the chief advocate of the myth theory in Germany, is rather a popularizer of other men's theories than an original thinker. He follows Robertson in deriving the myth of Jesus from a primitive cult of Joshua, which included a rite of human sacrifice, and holds that the figure of the suffering servant of Jahveh in Isaiah liii is really that of the typical sacrificial victim. He follows Smith in a symbolic interpretation of the Gospel story. He revives Dupuis's identification of John the Baptist with the Babylonian fish-god Ea, and adds some mythological equations of his own—e.g., that of the

Lamb (*Agnus*) with the Hindu god Agni, and that of Stephen the proto-martyr with the constellation of the Crown (*Stephanos*). Drews traces the rise of Christianity to a revulsion among Jewish intellectuals against the formalism of the Mosaic law, and accepts much of the Pauline literature as genuine, rejecting or explaining away those passages in it which appear to refer to an historical Jesus. Thus the "brethren of the Lord" mentioned in 1 Cor. ix, 5, and Gal. i, 19, are not brothers of Jesus, but "the followers of the religion of Jesus," or perhaps "a group of Christians distinguished by their piety." Drews follows Smith in rejecting the testimony of Tacitus as spurious.

The chief interest of Drews to the historian of religion lies in the fact that he convinced Lenin of the non-historicity of Jesus and thereby contributed to popularize the myth theory in the Soviet Union. But radical views on historical issues may go with an otherwise conservative philosophy. By an irony of fate Smith and Drews, unlike most exponents of the myth theory, are theists who hold that by purging religion of legendary accretions they are rendering it a service and enabling it better to withstand the attacks of materialism. This leads Lenin, while accepting the conclusions of Drews on the historical question, nevertheless to stigmatize him as a reactionary and a purveyor of new opium for old.

A useful maxim in scientific investigation is that of the fourteenth-century schoolman, William of Occam, which forbids the unnecessary multiplication of hypotheses. The forms of the myth theory so far examined rest on two hypotheses—Robertson's sacrificial cult of Joshua son of the Father, and Smith's allegorical interpretation of the Gospels—the evidence for both of which may appear rather shaky to many readers. We shall now turn to a theorist who, dispensing wholly with the first and partly with the second of these supports, yet maintains the Jesus of the New Testament to be a wholly mythical creation.

CHAPTER V

THE MYTH THEORY

II.—THE CREATION OF CHRIST

COUCHOUD. Paul Louis Couchoud, friend and medical attendant of Anatole France [1] and author of *The Enigma of Jesus* (1924), *The Book of Revelation: A Key to Christian Origins* (1932), and *The Creation of Christ: An Outline of the Beginnings of Christianity* (1939),[2] is beyond question the most cogent expounder of the myth theory since the pioneer work of J. M. Robertson, while his easy style and engaging manner render him by far the most readable French critic since Renan.

Couchoud is not an extremist. With most Latin scholars he regards the *Annals* of Tacitus, including the passage about the crucifixion, as genuine; but that passage merely echoes Christian evidence, probably collected by Tacitus himself when proconsul in Asia in A.D. 114, and is therefore inconclusive on the historicity of Jesus. The evidence of the Talmud is a mere parody of the Gospel story and is equally inconclusive.

The salient fact about Jesus, for Couchoud, is that he is a God. Paul, the earliest extant Christian author (eight of whose reputed epistles Couchoud regards as basically genuine, though much edited and interpolated), treats Jesus as God.

> "That is the miracle that baffles me. The Gospel miracles would present no difficulty. Were they a hundred times more numerous, I

[1] Couchoud is credibly reported to have been the real inspirer of France's famous story, *The Procurator of Judaea*, in which Pilate, asked in old age about the crucifixion of Jesus, answers: "*Jésus de Nazareth? Non, je ne me rappelle pas.*"

[2] The dates are those of the English editions.

> would not for so little doubt the existence of Jesus. The invincible obstacle is the worship of Jesus—the Christian religion. At bottom the existence of Christianity, far from proving the existence of Jesus, renders it impossible." [1]

Following other mythicists, Couchoud regards the name "Joshua," or "Jesus," as primarily a divine name. In the oldest Christian documents—the Pauline Epistles and the Apocalypse—it is nothing else. This name, first applied to the mythical leader of Israel into the promised land, was by a natural transition applied in the first century A.D. to the "anointed one" (*Messiah* or *Christos*) whom Jewish patriots expected soon to destroy the Roman Empire and inaugurate the golden age. Some looked for an uprising under a human leader, a descendant of David; others, despairing of any human king, looked for a Son of Man from heaven.

Couchoud accepts the historicity of John the Baptist, who is mentioned in Josephus as well as in the Gospels, and whom he regards as an agitator who proclaimed the imminent advent of the Messiah and was put to death in consequence by Herod Antipas. The Gospels, however, have "played hanky-panky" with the story and given us an apocryphal account of his death instead of the simple truth stated by Josephus:—

> "Herod feared that the powerful influence which he exercised over men's minds might lead to some act of revolt; for they seemed ready to do anything upon his advice. Herod therefore considered it far better to forestall him by putting him to death, before any revolution arose through him, than to rue his delay when plunged in the turmoil of an insurrection." [2]

The followers of John the Baptist were known as Nazoraeans—"those who observe." They lived to-

[1] Couchoud, *The Enigma of Jesus*, p. 86.
[2] Josephus, *Antiquities*, xviii, 5, 2.

gether in ascetic communities, fasted and prayed, initiated new members by baptism, and awaited the advent of the Son of Man. In a few years a split occurred among them. A study of the prophetic writings, notably of Isaiah liii, convinced some of them that the Messiah must have earned his office by suffering and death. Ecstasies induced by fasting and prayer led to actual visions of the slain and glorified Messiah. This section of Nazoraeans, whose leaders were Peter, James, and John, became the first Christian Church. For reasons that admit only of conjecture (perhaps due to the nature of their visions) James and certain others enjoyed the title of "brethren of the Lord." Couchoud dates the existence of this sect from about A.D. 37–38.

To the first Christians the death of the Messiah or Christ was not an earthly event at all. He was the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." [1] The mode of his death was at first unspecified. Paul, a rival visionary to Peter, James, and John, introduced from Psalm xxii the idea of his death by crucifixion. To Paul, however, the murderers of the Christ are not Jewish priests or Roman procurators, but Satan and his demons, the "rulers of this world, which are coming to nought." [2] The earliest Christian writings —the genuine Epistles of Paul and the Apocalypse (dated by Couchoud as early as A.D. 65)—reveal a mortal contest between the apostles of Jerusalem and the party associated with Paul as to the necessity of observing the Jewish law; but neither party writes of Jesus as of a human contemporary. "For John and for Paul God and Jesus are one." [3]

According to Couchoud no idea of giving Jesus an historical setting entered anyone's head until the second century.[4] By that time Jerusalem and its

[1] Rev. xiii, 8. [2] 1 Cor. ii, 6, 8.
[3] Couchoud, *The Creation of Christ*, p. 105.
[4] This is Couchoud's latest theory as expounded in *The Creation of Christ*. In his earlier work, *The Enigma of Jesus*, the Gospels are dated "about 80 to 110 or 120."

temple had been destroyed and Jewish nationalism defeated and discredited. But, as we know from Pliny, the worship of the Christ as God was widespread in Asia Minor and was giving the imperial authorities some trouble. To converts from paganism it was evident that the new god, like the old gods, must have had an earthly history. And because he was a new god, come to put an end to the reigning world-order, his earthly history had to be fairly recent. So by 114, when Tacitus was proconsul in Asia, the story was current that the Christ had suffered less than a century before under Pontius Pilate, whose cruelties were well known to readers of Josephus. Tacitus accordingly noted in his *Annals* that the mischievous Christian superstition owed its origin to one Christus, executed as a criminal by a Roman procurator.

The first written Gospel, according to Couchoud, was the work of Marcion. Marcion, on any showing, is a very remarkable figure in the history of early Christianity. A native of Sinope, in Pontus, a Christian by birth or by early conversion, and by profession a sea captain, his calling took him to different Mediterranean ports and enabled him to compare the different versions of Christianity preached in various cities. He came to the conclusion that the true doctrine had been corrupted from the very first by Jewish errors, and that it was necessary to restore it by ridding Christianity of every trace of Judaism. The Jewish God, the creator of the world, is a jealous and vindictive being; and the world is the sort of place we might expect such a being to create. Fortunately for us, according to Marcion, there is another God, a God of goodness, who sent his Son Jesus to redeem us from the clutches of this fiend. That can be done only by renunciation of the world and by practising poverty, celibacy, and non-resistance. Such, says Marcion, was the teaching of Jesus; but the apostles whom he chose did not understand him. They thought he was the *Christos*, the anointed king who should deliver Israel from its enemies, whereas he is the *Chrestos*, the

good God who will deliver mankind from the evil world. Paul alone, of the early apostles, understood this. In order, therefore, to restore true Christianity Marcion published a corrected edition of the Pauline Epistles, and an anonymous Gospel in which the opposition of Jesus to Judaism was stressed and any connection between them systematically eliminated.

This Gospel is not extant; but from the polemics written against Marcion by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and later Fathers its text has been reconstructed by modern critics with surprising accuracy. In general outline it resembles Luke, but differs in important respects.

The Jesus of Marcion is not born of a woman, but descends from heaven to Galilee in the likeness of a man and at once begins teaching. There is no baptism and no temptation story.

Jesus announces that he has come to do away with the law and the prophets. He delivers a discourse embodying certain features of the Sermon on the Mount, but to Gentiles, not Jews. Throughout the Gospel, references to the Old Testament are reduced to a minimum. Thus the saying, "Many prophets and kings desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not," is given in the curt form: "Prophets did not see what ye see." Jesus does not, as in our Gospels, compare himself to Jonah or to Solomon; he does not say that the blood of the prophets will be required of this generation; and he does not say that the Hebrew patriarchs and prophets will be admitted to the kingdom of God. Instead of saying that not a tittle of the law will fail, he says that not a syllable of his own words will fail. In replying to the Sadducees about the resurrection he makes no appeal to the Pentateuch. After his own resurrection he reproves the two disciples at Emmaus as slow of heart to believe, not, as in Luke, "all that the prophets have spoken," but "all that *I* have spoken."

Jewish Messianic expectations are repudiated. Thus, when Peter hails Jesus as the Christ, Jesus "reprimands" him. The prophecy that personal

disciples of Jesus will live to see the kingdom of God, the promise of rewards " now in this time " to those who have left all and followed him, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the expulsion of the traders from the temple, and the inscription on the cross, " This is the king of the Jews," are all omitted.

The twelve apostles are systematically belittled. The apostle Philip is identified with the man who, bidden to follow Jesus, asks first to go and bury his father and is rebuked for the wish. The seventy are given the title of " apostle " equally with the twelve. The request of James and John to sit by Jesus in his kingdom is given as in Mark; but the answer is curter: Jesus simply tells them that the place is reserved for others. Peter is not promised that his faith shall not fail; he makes no attempt to defend Jesus from arrest; after his denial he does not go out and weep bitterly; he does not visit the tomb after the resurrection; and he does not see the risen Lord before the rest do. The parting promise of Jesus that they shall be " clothed with power from on high " is omitted. The Gospel ends with the declaration that repentance and remission of sins shall be preached to all the nations: we are not told by whom, but it is evidently not to be by the twelve.

The usual view is that Marcion's Gospel is a variant of Luke edited by Marcion for his own purposes. According to Couchoud, so far is this from being the case that Marcion's is the original Gospel of which all the others are mutilated and interpolated versions. Couchoud dates Marcion's work in 133–134, during the last Jewish revolt against Rome under Barcocheba, and holds that the eschatological prophecies in the Gospels refer to this revolt and not to the war of 66–70. In the name " Barabbas " Couchoud sees a veiled allusion to Barcocheba, the false Messiah whom the Jews preferred to Jesus.

Marcion's Gospel, according to Couchoud, was written and meant to be read as an allegory. " The true subject of the Gospel is not Jesus, but the Chris-

tian cult." [1] For that very reason it did not go down with the mass of Christians, who by now were firmly convinced of the historicity of Jesus and wanted a straightforward story of his life and death. Another reason for the failure of Marcion's Gospel was its extreme anti-Judaism. Most Christians, though they had quarrelled with the Jews, set great store by the Old Testament and its real and alleged Messianic prophecies. The Gospel of Mark, therefore—written, according to Couchoud, about 135 at Rome and possibly in Latin [2]—while based on that of Marcion, restores the link with Judaism which Marcion severed and tries to give the story an air of reality. Jesus no longer descends direct from heaven. Though Mark gives no account of his birth, we are given to understand that he had a mother and brothers and a trade. He is tempted as men are tempted. He comes to fulfil Jewish prophecy, seeks baptism by the Messianist John, and confutes his enemies out of the Old Testament. To show that Jesus accepted the title of Messiah, Mark invents the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple. The twelve apostles are treated little better by Mark than by Marcion; but Peter is allowed to weep away his denial.

The Gospel of Matthew, according to Couchoud, was written in Syria and in the Aramaic language soon after Mark, and is based on both Mark and Marcion. It is an attempt to prove, in opposition to Marcion, that Jesus was the Messiah by making him fulfil in detail, from his birth onwards, the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. Matthew corrects Marcion's and Mark's cavalier treatment of the twelve apostles, and causes Jesus to reward Peter's confession of his Christhood by making him the rock

[1] *The Creation of Christ*, p. 167.

[2] The oldest Latin text, which Couchoud holds to be " better in many points " than the Greek, incidentally varies the order of Mark xiv, 41–42, so destroying J. M. Robertson's strongest argument for a dramatic original.

on which the Church is built and giving him the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

The Fourth Gospel is considered by Couchoud to be in all probability the work of John the Elder, the authority cited by Papias, and to have been written at Ephesus not long after 135. In its hatred of Judaism and in its almost openly allegorical treatment of the story of Jesus it approaches nearer to Marcionism than any of the Synoptic Gospels, though stopping short of Marcion's utter rejection of the Old Testament. Hence the slow acceptance of this Gospel by the Church.

Marcion, after finally breaking with the Church, died in 144. After the breach the Church, according to Couchoud, took over his Gospel and by "well-chosen additions" transformed it into our Gospel according to Luke. This was the work of Clement of Rome, whom Couchoud places half a century after his traditional date and regards as the "Admirable Crichton" of early Christianity. Not only was he the real author of the Third Gospel and the Acts, but he was the final editor of the Pauline Epistles, the fabricator of the two Petrine Epistles and that of Jude, and the compiler and publisher of the New Testament as we have it! Luke, or rather Clement, borrows from all the preceding evangelists, but writes with far greater artistry than they (witness the infancy narrative and such parables as those of the good Samaritan and the prodigal son) and by his corroborative details puts the final touches to the portrait of the historical Jesus. At the same time allusions to the human birth of Jesus were interpolated in the Pauline Epistles. The transformation of the God Jesus into the God-man was complete.

Thus, according to Couchoud, the Gospels are the product, not of a slow literary evolution, but of the intense activity of a few years in the second century. Hypotheses of primitive sources, documents behind documents, Q, proto-Mark, and the like, are flung to the winds. The Gospels are the Christian reaction

to Barcocheba's revolt. To counter the revolutionary Messianism of the Jews the evangelists portray a Christ whose kingdom is not of this world, hold him up as an example to the suffering masses of the Roman Empire, and say to them: "Not Barabbas, but this man!"

Rylands. L. Gordon Rylands, author of *The Evolution of Christianity* (1927), *The Christian Tradition* (1937), *The Beginnings of Gnostic Christianity* (1940), and other works, stresses, like Couchoud, the problem presented by the apparent deification of Jesus within a few years of the traditional date of his death. The silence of contemporary writers like Philo, and historians of the next generation like Josephus, as to the career of Jesus makes the status assigned to him in the Pauline Epistles inexplicable in terms of a human figure. Another fact calling for explanation is that in the Pauline literature we find evidence that contradictory doctrines about Jesus were already current: we read of "another Jesus, whom we did not preach," and of anathemas on those who preach "a different gospel." [1] What is more, Paul (or his personator) repeatedly claims that he derived his gospel, not from personal disciples of Jesus or from any human informant, but by supernatural revelation from Jesus himself.[2] What sort of evidence for a human Jesus is this? If we turn to other than Pauline writings, such as the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, we again find no reference to the career of Jesus, but only to the "knowledge" of divine things imparted through him to the faithful; while in the Apocalypse Jesus is a divine being from start to finish, depicted in imagery borrowed from the descriptions of Jahveh in Ezekiel and Daniel, and "slain from the foundation of the world." [3]

The truth, according to Rylands, is that the first Christians were Gnostics for whom the *Christos* or *Chrestos* was not a human contemporary, but a spirit

[1] 2 Cor. xi, 4; Gal. i, 6–9.
[2] 1 Cor. xi, 23; Gal. i, 11–12; ii, 6. [3] Rev. xiii, 8.

sent by God to save men from bondage to false gods and bring them to knowledge of himself. This spirit was identical with the "wisdom" described in the Book of Proverbs as the agent by which God created the world and by which he instructs men, and with the *logos* ("word" or "reason") which Philo of Alexandria took from Greek philosophy and personified as the teacher and comforter of men.

We have evidence of the nature of this Gnosticism in an ancient hymn-book discovered in 1908, the so-called *Odes of Solomon.* Rendel Harris, the discoverer, dates the *Odes* about the end of the first century A.D.; but as they are contained in the same MS. as the *Psalms of Solomon* (known from internal evidence to date from the last century B.C.) and never mention Jesus, Rylands regards them as pre-Christian and only slightly, if at all, interpolated by Christian hands. The *Odes* speak of the *logos*, or Christ, as dwelling in men and as triumphing over persecution, as we should speak of the triumph of virtue or of a good cause over its enemies, not of an historical individual. Here, then, we have a sect which shortly after, or perhaps shortly before the beginning of our era, sang hymns about a persecuted and triumphant Christ, but knew nothing of Jesus.

Rylands, however, follows J. M. Robertson and W. B. Smith in believing that "Joshua," or "Jesus," was a divine name in Palestine before the Christian era. He accepts Robertson's hypothesis of a cult of "Joshua son of the Father." Apart from this there is good evidence that some Jews expected Joshua to reappear as the Messiah: we have the Sibylline oracle quoted in the last chapter, and the following prophecy in the *Apocalypse of Ezra*, written about A.D. 100 and included in our Apocrypha under the title "2 Esdras":—

> "For my son Jesus shall be revealed with those that be with him, and shall rejoice them that remain four hundred years. After these years

> shall my son Christ die, and all that have the breath of life. And the world shall be turned into the old silence seven days, like as in the first beginning: so that no man shall remain. And after seven days the world, that yet awaketh not, shall be raised up, and that shall die that is corruptible. And the earth shall restore those that are asleep in her, and so shall the dust those that dwell therein in silence, and the secret places shall deliver those souls that were committed unto them." [1]

This is very unlikely to be a Christian interpolation. No Christian sect known to history ever held that Jesus Christ would reign on earth four hundred years and then die seven days before the general resurrection. The writer is a Jew; and the Jesus he speaks of is Joshua, come back to earth to reign as the Messiah. Seeing, then, that some Jews equated the Messiah with Joshua, it was natural that some Greek-speaking Gnostics should give their mystical Christ the name of Jesus.

Rylands follows Smith in holding that the Nazarenes were so named because they revered a guardian or saviour, Joshua or Jesus, whom they identified with the Messiah, and that it was from them that the Gnostics borrowed the appellation "Jesus Christ." Catholic Christianity arose by a fusion between Gnostics who believed in a mystical Christ and Nazarenes who expected a catastrophic overturn of the world-order by Joshua as Messiah. The fusion was preceded by a period of bitter rivalry between the two parties, and was not finally effected till the second century A.D. Even then it was not accepted by all, some Gnostics on the one side, and some Nazarenes on the other, repudiating the compromise and remaining outside the Church as heretics.

The New Testament consists of writings emanating from these sects before, during, and after the period

[1] 2 Esdras vii, 28–32.

of fusion. Rylands devotes a separate work to the critical examination of the chief Pauline Epistles, which he finds to contain a Gnostic nucleus dating from the first century A.D., some of it probably by Paul himself, but to have been put into their present shape by a Catholic editor in the second century. The earliest Gospel originated among the Gnostics, very likely before the end of the first century, and was written and meant to be read as an allegory. In this view Rylands follows W. B. Smith. But he does not, like Smith, identify the primitive Gospel with that of Mark, nor, like Couchoud, with that of Marcion. The primitive Gospel is lost; but the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*, dating in its present form from about A.D. 140, represents on the whole, in Rylands's opinion, an earlier version of it than any of our Gospels. In that Gospel the crucifixion of Jesus is ascribed to "Herod the king" and to the Jewish people. Rylands thinks that a vague tradition of an actual Jesus Ben-Pandira, put to death by the Jews at some date B.C., may have helped to give substance to an originally mythical story. The contradictory nature of the discourses of Jesus shows that they are not the utterances of one individual. They were attributed to him by the leaders of the Gnostic or Nazarene Churches in the same way that Old Testament writers attributed their prophecies to Jahveh; and their absence from Mark shows that they were inserted in the record comparatively late. The provision of Jesus with a mother and brothers is the last touch in a process of progressive humanization.

Dujardin. Edouard Dujardin, a French novelist, dramatist, and critic, who early in this century advanced some radical theories on the Old Testament, published late in life two books on Christian origins, an abridged English translation of which appeared in 1938 under the title *Ancient History of the God Jesus.* After dwelling on the silence of Josephus and the second-hand nature of the evidence of Tacitus (even if authentic) and the Talmud, Dujardin, like Couchoud

and Rylands, asks how, if Jesus was a man, his disciples from the time of Paul onward could have treated him as divine.

> "Sociology sees here an irrefutable argument against historicity. An eagle is not born from a fowl. A mystery religion cannot spring from a Messianic agitation. . . . There is not a shadow of doubt that Jesus, a spiritual being, has played in the annals of history a rôle far greater than any Galilean prophet could ever play." [1]

Since "Christians for eighteen centuries have worshipped Jesus as a god," [2] the presumption is that he was always a god. Here Dujardin takes over and develops J. M. Robertson's theory of a Palestinian cult of "Joshua son of the Father." The god of this cult, according to Dujardin, was originally a fish or eel venerated as a totem and, like other totems, eaten ritually by the prehistoric clan who practised the cult. Hence Joshua in the Old Testament is the son of Nun, "fish," having been himself a fish to begin with. With the rise of agriculture the cult became assimilated in some respects to those of Canaanitish agricultural deities; and on the arrival of the Hebrew nomads the god took on the attributes of a lamb. The central rite of the cult was a periodical expiatory sacrifice in which a human victim, representing the prehistoric god-king, was killed, hanged, and at sunset taken down and buried. This was followed by a day of mourning and then by a ritual meal consisting, according to locality, of fish, bread, or lamb, in which the god was mystically eaten by his worshippers. The rite took place at one of the numerous Gilgals ("circles" or ancient cromlechs) which are found in Palestine as in other countries. Hence Joshua, in the Old Testament, is credited with the erection of one of these stone circles near Jericho and is said to have kept the passover there.[3] Joshua is

[1] Dujardin, *Ancient History of the God Jesus*, pp. 4–6.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[3] Joshua iv, 20; v, 10.

also said to have hanged captured kings on trees—the only examples of this kind of treatment recorded in the Old Testament.[1] With the establishment of monotheism these local cults were suppressed. Thus Joshua survives in the Old Testament as a human figure, only his patronymic and a few stories like this betraying his original status. In order more effectually to ban the cult the eel was declared an unclean animal and its use as food forbidden. But in Galilee, and other centres where the writ of Jerusalem did not run, the cult of the old eel-god persisted until the conquest of the country by the Maccabees in the second century B.C., and even after that survived in secret among the farming and fishing population, though the killing of the human victim was by now merely simulated.

About A.D. 26 Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee, founded the city of Tiberias in honour of his overlord, the emperor Tiberius. The city was built in Greek style and had a large pagan population. Many of the Galilean inhabitants left the place; and Dujardin thinks that some of these, for the most part fishermen, migrated to Jericho in order to carry on their calling. Filled with religious fanaticism by the profanation of their motherland, they assembled at Gilgal to celebrate their three-day ritual drama of death and resurrection. A certain Simon of Cyrene may have personated the victim. During the ritual meal, in the religious ferment induced by the occasion, some of the company believed that they saw the risen god. That apparition, which Dujardin dates in A.D. 27, was the starting-point of Christianity. The visionaries, Peter, James, John, and the rest, began to spread the news that the Lord Jesus had appeared to them. The message was carried from city to city by Greek-speaking Jews of the "dispersion" and provided scattered groups of enthusiasts with a basis for the belief that the pagan

[1] Joshua viii, 29; x, 26. Gilgal was the place where "Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before Jahveh"—another connection with ancient human sacrifice (1 Sam. xv, 33).

world-order would soon be destroyed by divine agency and the kingdom of God inaugurated. Since the god of a cult is only a personification of the group itself, Dujardin holds that divine agency did not exclude revolutionary action by the Christians. The martyrs of the year 64 may really have set fire to Rome.

The worship of Jesus, the God of the new order, bears enduring traces of the primitive cult from which it sprang. Jesus is represented in catacomb paintings in the form of a fish. The miracle of the loaves and fishes in the Gospels is a mythical projection of the ritual meal. Golgotha, or Golgoltha, the scene of the crucifixion, is unknown outside the Gospels in the topography of Jerusalem; in point of fact it is Gilgal, and has been shifted to Jerusalem in the process of myth-making. Simon of Cyrene retains a place in the story as the man who carries the cross; he was held by some second-century Gnostics to have been crucified in place of Jesus.

To the first Christians Jesus was simply a God who died for men, was buried, rose again the third day, and appeared to Peter and others as a pledge that after the impending destruction of the ancient world they would enjoy eternal life with him in the kingdom of God. But years passed, and the Roman Empire refused to disappear. After A.D. 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed, the Church aspired to succeed to the inheritance of Judaism. With this object the Gospel story was elaborated, the drama of the death and resurrection of Jesus expanded into a ministry of a year or more, and discourses were put into his mouth enjoining non-resistance to evil and submission to Rome. The Pauline Epistles were interpolated and new Epistles forged in the same sense. To Dujardin, who sympathizes with revolutionary movements, the Gospels represent the degenerate phase of early Christianity. In them the Church of the Dark Ages, with its vested interests, defended by an elaborate fairy-tale of heaven, hell, and purgatory, is already in the making.

CHAPTER VI

THE MYTH THEORY CRITICIZED

IN the last two chapters I stated the case for the myth theory as forcibly as possible, emphasizing those arguments which seemed to be most cogent. I deliberately omitted certain others which in my judgment do the case more harm than good.

Some Mistakes. For example, an objection to the myth theory is the lack of evidence that any early critics of Christianity denied the historicity of Jesus. To meet this objection J. M. Robertson and Rylands adduce the following passage from the Ignatian Epistle to the Philadelphians:—

> "I have heard certain men say: 'If I do not find it in the archives, I do not believe in the gospel.' And as I replied to them: 'It is written,' they answered: 'That is the very question.' But for me the archives are Jesus Christ, his cross, his death, his resurrection, and the faith which comes from him." [1]

The text of this passage is admittedly uncertain. Adopting the above translation, which is that of Salomon Reinach, Robertson and Rylands argue that Ignatius here refers to opponents who denied the historicity of Jesus.[2] It may be so; but the text does not say it. The subject of discussion between Ignatius and his opponents is said to be "the gospel"—i.e. not the mere existence, but the Christhood and Godhead of Jesus. On that issue we can agree with Rylands that Ignatius begs the question; but it has no bearing on the myth theory.

[1] Ignatius, *Philad.* viii. In Wake and Burton's *Apostolic Fathers* the word here translated "archives" is rendered by "originals," and there are other material differences.

[2] J. M. Robertson, *Jesus and Judas*, pp. 122–123. Rylands, *The Evolution of Christianity*, p. 225.

Again, Robertson, Couchoud, and Rylands all see a denial of the historicity of Jesus in the words quoted in Chapter II from Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew.* To save reference back, I will repeat them:—

> "The Messiah [*Christos*], if he is born and exists anywhere, is unknown to others and even to himself and has no power until Elijah comes and anoints him and makes him manifest to all. You have accepted an idle report and fashioned a sort of Messiah for yourselves, and for his sake inconsiderately throw away your lives." [1]

To anyone reading the first sentence in full it should be evident that Trypho is talking about the Messiah whom he and his fellow Jews expect, and giving a reason why Jesus cannot be that Messiah. But, by omitting the words after "unknown," Robertson makes the sentence read as if it referred directly to Jesus.[2] Rylands does the same and aggravates the case by mistranslating: "If he was born and lived somewhere, he is entirely unknown"—rendering the Greek *esti* ("exists") by a past verb and so making it appear that Trypho is talking about an unknown Jesus in the past instead of, as the context shows, about an unknown Messiah in the present or future.[3] Couchoud does not quote this sentence, but translates the second: "You follow an empty rumour. You have fashioned a Messiah for yourselves," [4] missing, as do Robertson and Rylands, the ironic force of *Christon tina* ("a sort of Messiah"). All three fail to see that the question at issue here, as elsewhere in the *Dialogue*, is not the existence of Jesus, but his Messiahship. The passage has no connection whatever with the myth theory.

Again, Robertson and Rylands draw attention to

[1] Justin, *Dialogue*, 8.
[2] J. M. Robertson, *Jesus and Judas*, p. 140.
[3] Rylands, *The Evolution of Christianity*, p. 225; *The Beginnings of Gnostic Christianity*, p. 191.
[4] Couchoud, *The Enigma of Jesus*, p. 30.

the fact that an admittedly early Gnostic sect, the Ophites, or Naassenes ("snake-worshippers"), are described by Hippolytus in the third century A.D. as using a hymn in which Jesus, evidently conceived as a divine being, begs his Father to let him descend to earth to liberate the soul of man. No one doubts that Jesus was a divine being for the Gnostics: the question is when he began to be so. The bearing of the Naassene hymn on the myth theory obviously depends on its date; and we know nothing about its date except that it must be older than the third century A.D. A hymn is not necessarily as old as the sect who use it. Until we know more, Loisy is manifestly justified in refusing to base on it any inference as to the historicity of Jesus. The same objection applies to mythicist arguments based on the Gnostic gem and the magic papyrus mentioned in Chapter IV.

The reader, in fact, must have been struck by the weakness of several of the arguments set forth in the last two chapters. Critics who dismiss the whole Gospel story as mythical are clearly not entitled to infer the existence of a pre-Christian cult of Jesus from incidents recorded in the Gospels. The incident, for example, related in Mark ix, 38 (where the disciples see a man casting out demons in the name of Jesus and forbid him because he is not one of themselves) is, on the showing of the mythicist, fictitious, and therefore cannot be used, as Robertson and Rylands use it, to prove that the name "Jesus" was used by exorcists before the advent of Christianity.

Again, the account given by Philo of an anti-Jewish "rag" at Alexandria, when the mob dressed up a lunatic named Karabas to mock the Jewish king Agrippa, yields at best a flimsy support for the theory of an age-old cult of Barabbas. And even that support has to be procured by altering the name!

The theory, favoured by Robertson and Rylands, that Bethlehem was an old seat of the worship of Tammuz rests on a letter of Jerome in which that Father, who settled there at the end of the fourth

century, states that the emperor Hadrian, in order to desecrate the holy places, built a temple of Jupiter at the scene of the resurrection and a temple of Venus at the scene of the crucifixion, and planted a grove of Adonis at Bethlehem, which remained until the reign of Constantine. We need not accept Jerome's statement of the emperor's motive. Hadrian was a tolerant ruler; and Christianity was not formidable enough in his time to merit such elaborate affronts. It was the Jews, red-handed from their recent revolt under Barcocheba, whom Hadrian was out to crush. He rebuilt Jerusalem as a Roman colony under the name of Aelia Capitolina, forbade the Jews to live in the vicinity, and no doubt desecrated Bethlehem as the traditional home of David and as part of the same policy. Bethlehem may have been—and, like most towns in Palestine, probably was—a prehistoric pagan sanctuary of some sort or other, but Jerome does not say so; and if it was, it is unlikely that pagan worship persisted five miles from Jerusalem throughout the period of the second temple, including the Maccabean era, and down to the time of Hadrian. The connection, therefore, between Tammuz and Jesus remains conjectural.

The theory of Robertson and Rylands that "the carpenter's son" in Matth. xiii, 55, is a cryptogram for "the Son of God" is refuted by the context. The evangelist is here speaking, not in his own person, but in that of the unbelieving townsmen of Jesus. Coming from them, the question, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" if taken literally, is in character and agrees with what immediately follows, viz:—

> "Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?"

To read "the carpenter" as denoting the *demiourgos* or architect of the universe makes rubbish of the whole passage. For unbelieving Jews to attri-

bute divine parentage to Jesus would be totally out of character. Couchoud, in many ways the ablest of the mythicists, has his own symbolic interpretation, but at least avoids that pitfall.

It will have been noticed that mythicists are by no means in complete accord with one another. J. M. Robertson, in *The Jesus Problem*, subjects W. B. Smith's theory of Gospel symbolism to some pertinent criticism. Smith's theory, as we have seen, is that early Christianity was first and foremost a monotheist crusade against all forms of polytheism, and that the miracles of Jesus in the Gospels are an allegory of the victory of the true God over false gods. Against this Robertson points out, firstly, that Jesus is always a separate person from Jahveh, and that to affirm the divinity of both is incompatible with pure monotheism. Secondly, while a number of Gospel stories can be interpreted as allegories, they were written primarily as propaganda; and competent propagandists do not deliberately set out to be misunderstood.

> "It is not by such manipulation that cults are made popular, congregations collected, and revenue secured. And it was on these practical lines that Christianity was 'stablished.' . . . On any view, it can hardly be doubted that the stories of healing made their popular appeal as simple miracles." [1]

Here Robertson, who as an active politician knew the conditions of successful propaganda, has an evident advantage over the professor of mathematics. On the other hand, Robertson's own theory of a pre-Christian cult of Jesus may be said to have been refuted in the most effective way possible by Couchoud, who, while paying a generous tribute to his predecessor, frames a coherent myth theory without any recourse to that hypothesis.

But when allowance has been made for mistakes

[1] J. M. Robertson, *The*

and disagreements the myth theory still has to be taken seriously. In stressing the analogy between Jesus and other saviour-gods of antiquity, the silence of Josephus, the testimony of the Pauline Epistles to the divinity of Jesus, conjoined with their silence as to his life and teaching, and the contradictions in the Gospel story and in the utterances which it ascribes to Jesus, the mythicists have done a service to historical science and thrown down a challenge which no writer on the subject can ignore. Let us see how recent defenders of the historicity of Jesus meet that challenge.

Conybeare. Frederick Cornwallis Conybeare, a distinguished Orientalist, deals with Christian origins in two books, *Myth, Magic, and Morals* (1909) and *The Historical Christ* (1914). He distinguishes between the historical Jesus, who in his opinion underlies the Synoptic Gospels (especially Mark), and the "Christ of their own theory and imaginings" created by Paul and later theologians. In order to vindicate the former he puts the latter completely aside, though from the epistolary references to Jesus as "born of a woman" and "of the seed of David according to the flesh" [1] he infers that Paul knew more of the historical Jesus than he chose to tell.

In assessing the value of the Gospel story it makes all the difference whether we regard it, with Schmiedel, as the progressive deification of a man, or with W. B. Smith, Couchoud, and Rylands, as the progressive humanization of a God. Conybeare therefore attaches importance to Schmiedel's "pillar" texts. Adopting the view of most critics that Mark is the oldest Gospel and that Matthew and Luke used his work in compiling their own, Conybeare compares these texts as they appear in the three Gospels and finds that they show a progressive deification of Jesus. To Schmiedel's examples, some of which are mentioned in Chapter III, Conybeare adds others. Thus in Mark's account of the baptism of Jesus the voice

[1] Gal. iv, 4; Rom. i, 3.

from heaven declaring him the Son of God is addressed to him alone.[1] In Matthew the voice speaks of Jesus in the third person and is addressed to all present.[2] Mark relates that at Capernaum they brought to Jesus "all that were sick, and them that were possessed with devils," and that he healed "many." [3] Matthew says that they brought "many," and that he healed "all." [4] Luke says that "all" that had any sick brought them, and that he healed "every one." [5] Mark makes Jesus cure people by his spittle.[6] Matthew and Luke omit such touches as unworthy of the Son of God. This does not prove that the incidents related by Mark are historical; but it proves that Matthew and Luke, in using Mark, suppressed or amended features which suggested that Jesus's power was limited or dependent on material means. The historicist may fairly claim that J. M. Robertson's criticism of Schmiedel deals too much with the question whether the "pillar" texts *could* have been invented, and too little with the question why, if Jesus from the first was God and nothing else, the Gospel versions of these texts should have been rehandled in the way they were.

Conybeare does not regard even the Gospel of Mark as genuine history.

> "The greater part of that Gospel is the work of someone who was by instinct and predilection a miracle-monger." [7]

But the progressive deification of Jesus in the Gospels points, in his opinion, to a human figure as the starting-point of the process. He finds his conclusion confirmed by the fact that in the early centuries a large number of Christians regarded Jesus as a man born of human parents. Justin, though he believes in the deity of Jesus, admits, in the *Dialogue with*

[1] Mark i, 11. [2] Matth. iii, 17.
[3] Mark i, 32–34. [4] Matth. viii, 16.
[5] Luke iv, 40. [6] Mark vii, 32–37; viii, 22–26.
[7] Conybeare, *Myth, Magic, and Morals*, pp. 140–141.

Trypho, that many Christians do not. The fact is that until creeds were drawn up by General Councils, and enforced by persecution, the Church had no uniform Christology. Paul of Samosata and Archelaus of Armenia, in the third century, and Aphraates in Mesopotamia in the fourth, taught that Jesus was not divine by nature, but became so by the descent of the Spirit at his baptism. The fact that these opinions prevailed mostly in Semitic countries, where traditions of a real Jesus would be likely to persist, is significant. The mythicist contention that Jesus was primarily a God over-simplifies the situation. For some Christians he was primarily a God, for others primarily a man; and the creed eventually imposed in the fourth century was a forced compromise between the parties.

So far Conybeare is on strong ground. But he shows himself less than critical when he accepts the sayings collected in Q (the document used by Matthew and Luke, but not Mark) as mainly genuine on the ground that they have a "common *cachet*." Many of these sayings, notably the injunctions to non-resistance, the condemnation of divorce, and the Lord's Prayer, have close parallels in the later books of the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, and the Talmud; and their "common *cachet*" is simply that of popular Judaism. Of those that cannot be so paralleled the distinctive features are the announcement that the kingdom of God is at hand, that Jesus is the Messiah and greater than Jonah or Solomon, and that those who reject him will be punished and those who follow him rewarded. Such sayings have little in common with those which bid us love our enemies, judge not that we be not judged, and forgive until seventy times seven. If the "common *cachet*" of these Messianic utterances is held to authenticate them as against the rest, it would follow that the most probably genuine sayings of Jesus are those prophecies which were most signally falsified by the event.

Klausner. Joseph Klausner's *Jesus of Nazareth:*

His Life, Times, and Teaching (1922) is written from the point of view of a modern Jew. Its main value lies in its analysis of the Jewish evidence, particularly that of the Talmud, for the historicity of Jesus. Klausner points out that the Talmud is primarily concerned with Old Testament exegesis and with Jewish canon law (*halakha*), and that it refers to events of the period of the second temple only when relevant to these subjects. That references to Jesus should be scanty is therefore not surprising. Of those which exist, only statements emanating from rabbis of the first two centuries A.D. (*Tannaim* or "teachers" *par excellence*) are of any historical importance; and of these the only one which takes us back to contemporary tradition is that mentioned in Chapter II, in which Eliezer ben-Hyrcanus relates his encounter with a personal disciple of Jesus at Sephoris. Klausner considers that incident authentic. It may be objected that the *Gemara*, in which it is recorded, was not compiled until A.D. 200–500, and that in view of the general nature of religious compilations we cannot be certain that earlier rabbinical utterances are accurately reported; but it is difficult to discern a motive for invention in this case. The Talmudic evidence has at least a negative value, since it shows that whatever the merits of the myth theory may be, it did not occur to the rabbis of those days to use it against Christianity.

Klausner is less happy in his attempt partially to rehabilitate the notorious paragraph about Jesus in the *Antiquities* of Josephus. He deletes from the paragraph all words which refer to the superhuman status, Messiahship, and resurrection of Jesus, and offers the residue as authentic. But that residue is such a broken stump of a paragraph as to be hardly worth contending for. If Josephus considered the origins of Christianity worth writing about at all, he would surely have written more than five short sentences. Moreover, an orthodox Jew, wishing to stand well with Rome, is almost as unlikely to have

called Jesus " a wise man, a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure," as to have called him the Messiah. The paragraph is unsalvable.

After this preliminary analysis of the evidence Klausner proceeds to write a life of Jesus consistent with the Talmudic picture of a heretical rabbi with a reputation for wonder-working. The book is steeped in rabbinical learning, but is not free from inaccuracies. Klausner emphasizes the fact that the ethical teaching of the Gospels can be paralleled from beginning to end in the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, or the Talmud. He considers that the originality of Jesus lay in freeing the moral law from the mass of legal detail in which it is embedded in the Jewish sources, but he does not face the difficulty presented to this view of Jesus's teaching by the silence of Paul.

Eisler. Robert Eisler's *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist* (English edition, 1931) is the most original and ambitious work on the subject which has appeared in recent years. Eisler, who, like Klausner, is a Jew and therefore free from Christian presuppositions, begins by pointing out the strongest objection to the myth theory—namely, the failure of ancient critics of Christianity to use this rejoinder (obvious if true) to its pretensions. The issue between the early Christians and their opponents was not whether Jesus had existed, but whether he was the Son of God. Since the Gospels were written to prove that he was the Son of God, we must go for historical truth, not to them, but to non-Christian sources. The evidence of Tacitus (whose vicious attack on Christianity could not have been forged by a Christian), Celsus, and the Talmud (especially the statement of Eliezer ben-Hyrcanus already cited) is sufficient, in the opinion of Eisler, to establish the historical existence of Jesus the Nazoraean, whom his followers called the Messiah or Christ, and who was executed as a rebel by Pilate, procurator of Judaea.

But Eisler's main concern is with the text of

Josephus. Since the Christians, after attaining power, admittedly not only interpolated but also mutilated MSS. which passed through their hands, he argues that the paragraph on Jesus in the *Antiquities* is a Christian revision of an originally anti-Christian text, of which he offers a "purely hypothetical" reconstruction.[1] Eisler's restored text is a more plausible piece of work than Klausner's, but in the nature of the case is no more than an ingenious conjecture. In support of the contention that Josephus must have given a hostile account of the origin of Christianity, Eisler points out that the existing paragraph is immediately followed by a scandalous story of the seduction of a Roman lady in the temple of Isis which has nothing to do with Jewish history, and in its present context is pointless, but which falls naturally into place if we suppose that the original account of Jesus included a gibe at the Christian story of the virgin birth. The present state of the text certainly suggests deletion as well as insertion; and the probability of such deletion is the strongest argument of those who refuse to see in the silence of Josephus a fatal objection to the historicity of Jesus.[2]

A second short reference to Jesus occurs in *Antiquities* xx, 9, 1, where Josephus, in relating the events of A.D. 62, says that the high priest Ananus, or Ananias, caused "the brother of Jesus who was called Christ, James by name, and some others" to be stoned as breakers of the law. Our verdict on this passage must depend on our view as to the original text of

[1] Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*, pp. 50–62.

[2] J. M. Robertson admits that the hypothesis of deletion is possible (*The Jesus Problem*, pp. 123–124). The argument often used in such cases, that the removal of the disputed passage leaves no visible lacuna, is a dangerous weapon. It would make short work of many passages in Shakespeare, as anyone with leisure can prove for himself. E.g., in Portia's speech on the quality of mercy (*Merchant of Venice*, iv, 1) the words: "We do pray for mercy; and that same prayer doth teach us all to render the deeds of mercy," are by this criterion a glaring interpolation!

Book xviii. Those who hold that that book originally contained no account of Jesus usually, with J. M. Robertson, W. B. Smith, Couchoud, and Rylands, reject the later reference too. It is unlikely that Josephus would have mentioned Jesus here if he mentioned him nowhere else. This passage, however, is not so plainly spurious as the other; and if the paragraph in Book xviii displaced an originally hostile account of Jesus, the reference in Book xx is likely to be genuine.

The greater part of Eisler's book deals with the Old Russian version of Josephus's *Jewish War*. This was translated from the Greek in the thirteenth century by an heretical sect who held to the ancient Ebionite view of Jesus as a prophet, and as Son of God by adoption only and not by nature. The existence of this version was first brought to the attention of the modern world in 1866, but it was not published until 1924–27. The Old Russian text differs in many places from the extant Greek text of Josephus, and in particular contains passages on John the Baptist and Jesus which do not occur in the Greek text at all. Many of the peculiarities of the Old Russian version are transparently due to medieval interpolation; but Eisler contends that not all admit of this explanation. He further claims to show, on linguistic grounds, that the Old Russian translation was made from an older Greek text than that now extant—in fact from a text based on the original Aramaic draft of Josephus's *Jewish War*.

The Old Russian version dates the first appearance of the Baptist, not, as Luke does, in the fifteenth year of Tiberius (A.D. 28–29), but soon after the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C., and depicts him as a political agitator preaching national independence. After a long interval the Baptist reappears in A.D. 34, denounces Herod Antipas for his marriage with Herodias, and is put to death. The narrator does not name John, but refers to him as "a man," "that man," or "the wild man." Eisler suggests that this

is because Josephus, when he wrote the *Jewish War*, did not know his true name. He points out that the Mandaean sect, who revere the memory of the Baptist, call him by two names, Jahiah and Johana, and that agitators often go by various *aliases* to conceal their identity. Dupuis and Drews may even be right in deriving *Ioannes* from the Babylonian fish-god Ea or Oannes, and the Baptist yet be an historical figure. The Talmud mentions a certain "Hanan the hidden one," a rain-making magician who hid from persecution about the beginning of our era. "Hanan" is merely a variant of "Johanan," or "John." Eisler, agreeing here with Couchoud, identifies the followers of the Baptist with the Nazoraeans, "keepers of secrets" or "guardians of special usages or doctrines." The account of John in the *Antiquities*, quoted in the last chapter, has in Eisler's view been mutilated by Christian editors in order to conceal the revolutionary character of the movement, further evidence of which is afforded by the Gospel saying:—

> "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force." [1]

The passage of the Old Russian text relating to Jesus leads off in the language of the forged paragraph in the *Antiquities*:—

> "At that time there appeared a certain man, if it is meet to call him a man. His nature and form were human, but the appearance of him more than that of a human being: yet his works were divine. He wrought miracles wonderful and strong."

Some said that he was Moses risen from the dead, others that he was sent by God. He criticizes the Jewish law, arouses Messianic hopes, and gathers an expectant multitude on the Mount of Olives. The

[1] Matth. xi, 12, characteristically toned down in Luke xvi, 16.

Jewish leaders take fright and inform Pilate, who has " many of the multitude slain." The wonder-worker is arrested, but acquitted by Pilate and discharged. Then the scribes pay Pilate thirty talents for leave to deal with the case themselves, and crucify the obnoxious preacher " contrary to the law of their fathers."

As it stands, this is a barefaced forgery—a free fantasia on the Gospel story, with Pilate's thirty talents substituted for Judas's thirty pieces of silver. But Eisler believes that, by stripping the text of every phrase incompatible with Jewish authorship, the " authentic work of Josephus " may be disentangled. In this way we get a picture of a wonder-worker with Messianic pretensions who is denounced by the priests and executed by Pilate in accordance with historic probability.

Eisler finds corroborative evidence elsewhere for the view that the movement led by Jesus, like that associated with the Baptist, was revolutionary in character. There is, for example, the odd statement in the *Histories* of Tacitus that Judaea was " quiet " in the reign of Tiberius, in contrast with the picture of turmoil painted by Josephus. Eisler conjectures that Tacitus actually depicted the condition of Judaea under Tiberius as anything but quiet, but that Christian copyists suppressed his account because it connected the disturbances with Jesus. Hierocles, an anti-Christian writer of about A.D. 300, whose works have perished like others of their kind, is quoted by Lactantius as saying that Jesus was the leader of a band of nine hundred robbers—the stock official description of Jewish revolutionaries. The Gospels themselves, though compiled by men who had every interest in conciliating Rome, betray the truth in a number of ways. " Barjona," the name given to Peter in Matth. xvi, 17, is usually understood as a patronymic. But the Talmud uses *barjonim* as a synonym for the revolutionary or Zealot party. Add the accounts of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem amid

Messianic acclamations ; [1] Mark's revealing allusion to " *the* insurgents who had committed murder in *the* insurrection " [2] (till then unmentioned) ; and the title on the cross: " The king of the Jews "; and we have strong circumstantial evidence that the record of a revolutionary movement has been edited and re-edited by the evangelists in the interest of other-worldly quietism.

In the hands of Eisler the quest of the historical Jesus becomes as exciting as a detective story. But he strains the evidence in favour of his thesis, and at times shows himself amazingly uncritical. He cites, in support of his view, a Syriac document, the *Letter of Mara bar Serapion,* which he confidently assigns to the first century, though such authorities as Cureton and M'Lean date it in the second or even third. Again, in the Old Russian account of the Baptist, Herodias is the wife, first of the tetrarch Philip, and then of Antipas. Now we know, from the *Antiquities* of Josephus, that Herodias was not the wife of Philip, but of a half-brother of his, living in Rome, named Herod, whom she deserted to marry Antipas. The Gospels erroneously make her the wife of Philip; [3] and the Old Russian text repeats the error. Yet Eisler treats the Old Russian account of the Baptist as authentic throughout. In dealing with the account of Jesus he unwarrantably assumes that everything which *might* have been written by a Jew *must* have been written by Josephus, oblivious of the possibility that it may have been forged to bolster the peculiar views of the heretics, neither wholly Christian nor wholly Jewish, through whose hands the text admittedly passed both before and after its translation into Old Russian. It is possible that there was a revolutionary movement under Pilate of the kind

[1] The word " hosanna " or " oshana," in Aramaic, means " Free us "—a seditious expression.

[2] Mark xv, 7, literally translated. In our Bibles the first definite article is suppressed and the point therefore blunted.

[3] Matth. xiv, 3; Mark vi, 17.

described, and certain that, if there was, the Church censored the facts to the best of its ability. But the Old Russian Josephus does not prove it.

Goguel. Maurice Goguel, a French Protestant theologian, in his *Jesus the Nazarene—Myth or History?* (1925) and *The Life of Jesus* (1932), stresses, like other critics of the myth theory, the fact that ancient opponents of Christianity do not deny the historicity of Jesus. Like Eisler, he holds that the forged paragraph in the *Antiquities* has replaced a genuine account of Jesus; but he refuses to follow the Jewish scholar in his attempted reconstruction, and uncompromisingly rejects the Old Russian Josephus. Goguel holds that early non-Christian evidence is sufficient to establish "that a person did once exist whose name was Jesus or Christ, and that he was crucified in Palestine during the reign of Tiberius"; but no more.[1]

Goguel admits that the Jesus of Paul is primarily a divine being, and his crucifixion the work of demons. But he is at the same time a Jew descended from David and put to death by men. Paul's doctrine is not logical, but a jumble of dissimilar elements, of which an historical tradition about Jesus is one. He speaks of "brethren of the Lord" as his contemporaries; and, as he distinguishes them from the apostles and from Christians generally, he must be presumed to mean literal brothers of Jesus. Christianity is a mystery religion, but differs from the mysteries of Osiris, Attis, and Mithra, in that, while they assigned to the divine hero a fabulous antiquity, the Christians assigned to theirs a date in recent history.

Goguel pleads, not unreasonably, that absolute certainty is not to be expected in history, and claims that a credible account of Jesus can be written on the basis of "pillar" texts such as those adduced by Schmiedel. Anecdotes of Jesus which contradict the views current in the earliest churches are probably

[1] Goguel, *The Life of Jesus*, p. 70.

historical. Thus, Jesus is represented as telling the apostles not to preach to Gentiles or Samaritans.[1] He is with difficulty induced to heal the daughter of a Phoenician woman.[2] But Christianity was preached to Gentiles at any rate from the time of Paul; therefore these anecdotes were current earlier; that is, they go back to Jesus himself. Again, Jesus on many occasions predicts his own sufferings. Some of these predictions, e.g. Matth. xvi, 21, refer to the resurrection; but others, e.g. Mark ix, 12, and Luke xvii, 25, do not. The latter are authentic; for if Christians had invented them they would have mentioned the resurrection. In this way Goguel constructs a picture of a Jewish faith-healer who becomes convinced that he is the destined Messiah, but that to be the Messiah he must first suffer and be rejected, and who to fulfil the Messianic programme deliberately affronts the authorities in Jerusalem and is crucified by Pilate as a police measure.

All this may have happened. But Goguel does not explain why Paul should have identified this Jesus with "the power of God and the wisdom of God," [3] nor why the first Christians should have been (as he admits they were) unconcerned with his earthly life and interested only in his resurrection and future return. Goguel, in fact, brings us face to face more than ever with the difficulty stated by Couchoud:—

> "Critics have taken pains to construct for us a historical Jesus with some show of probability. But they have not realised that the more probable they rendered Jesus the more improbable they rendered Paul. So that now we have to choose between Paul and their Jesus. But we have Paul, and their Jesus is after all but a hypothesis." [4]

Howell Smith. A useful compendium of the arguments against the myth theory will be found in *Jesus*

[1] Matth. x, 5. [2] Matth. xv, 21–28; Mark vii, 24–30.
[3] 1 Cor. i, 24. [4] Couchoud, *The Enigma of Jesus*, p. 87.

not a Myth, by A. D. Howell Smith, a director of the Rationalist Press Association. He devotes a chapter to showing the arbitrary character of W. B. Smith's theory of Gospel symbolism, which we have seen fails to convince entirely even J. M. Robertson; another chapter to showing the equally arbitrary character of the theory of Dujardin—incidentally pointing out that, while Jesus is often represented in catacomb frescoes by a fish, the fish is never an eel; and a third chapter to showing the flimsiness of the evidence for a pre-Christian cult of Joshua—a hypothesis which, as we saw, Couchoud finds unnecessary. The real problem of the mythicist, as Howell Smith points out, is to explain why the worshippers of a God Jesus should have given him an historical setting as recent as the procuratorship of Pilate. If Jesus was a God to the first Christians, why in such writings as the Synoptic Gospels, the Acts, the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, and *The Shepherd* of Hermas, is he not called God? How came Papias, in the second century, to seek information about the sayings of Jesus, from men who had met his disciples, if Jesus never lived and therefore had no disciples? It is such circumstances which distinguish the case of Jesus from that of the prehistoric saviour-gods, and for which any critic who is more than a mere iconoclast is bound to account.

Further, all three Synoptic Gospels put into the mouth of Jesus a repeated prophecy that his own generation will not pass away before the Messianic kingdom is established.[1] Whatever may be the date of the Gospels in their present shape, the natural

[1] Matth. x, 23; xvi, 28; xxiv, 34. Mark ix, 1; xiii, 30. Luke ix, 27; xxi, 32. Attention was drawn to these texts by the present writer in *The Rationalist Annual*, 1928 ("The Historical Jesus: Some Suggestions," by "Robert Arch"). Rylands, in *The Christian Tradition* (1937), replies to the point then made, arguing that a Christian writer would not have been "deterred by any consideration of incongruity" from making Jesus utter a prophecy *ipso facto* unfulfillable. Yet Rylands says that the evangelists were "not unintelligent men"!

inference from these texts is that they, at any rate, were committed to writing at a time when men still living could remember a real Jesus. We are not obliged to believe that Jesus really uttered such predictions; but can we avoid the conclusion that the person to whom they were attributed really lived? Very few mythicists face this problem. J. M. Robertson does not even see its existence. He thinks that such predictions may "perfectly well" have been made by some unknown prophet or prophets and later put into the mouth of Jesus by uncritical Christians, and that, once written down, they continued to be accepted by sheer force of inertia.[1] But why were they ascribed to Jesus in the first place? Would the most uncritical Christian attribute to Jesus a prophecy that "this generation"—nay, "some of them that stand here"—would not pass away if at the time of writing no one of the generation of Jesus was alive? Couchoud has the merit of at least seeing the problem. He thinks that the prophecy in its present form was framed to meet the situation which arose when John, the last survivor of the earliest generation of Christians, whom many had expected to live till the Lord came, died at Ephesus in the reign of Trajan. To save appearances Mark made Jesus say, not that John would not die, but that "some" of the bystanders would not die—a prediction which "might refer in Mark's day to some known or unknown centenarian."[2] This explanation assumes the truth of the tradition of John's longevity, which, as we saw in Chapter I, probably rests on a misunderstanding. Even if it were true, hypothetical centenarians do not help the mythicist. He posits centenarians who remembered—what, if not an historical Jesus?

But it turns out that these living links between the age of Jesus and the age of the Gospels need not have been centenarians. Howell Smith draws attention to a discovery which makes impossible the late dates

[1] J. M. Robertson, *The Jesus Problem*, pp. 198–201.
[2] Couchoud, *The Creation of Christ*, p. 258.

assigned to the Gospels by the Tübingen school and by mythicists from Bruno Bauer to Couchoud. A papyrus has been discovered containing a fragment of the Fourth Gospel (the John Rylands fragment) which in the opinion of experts cannot be later than about A.D. 130. If the Fourth Gospel existed then, it had probably been in circulation for some years; and the Synoptic Gospels are by general consent older than the Fourth. This throws back the Gospels to the early years of the second century. But we cannot stop there; for since the eschatological prophecies in the Synoptic Gospels are too early to relate to the Jewish war of 132–135, there is no reason for not relating them to the war of 66–70.[1] Parts of the Synoptic Gospels, therefore, date from the first century; and the statements of Papias about Matthew and Mark (if we understand by these, not the present Gospels, but their nuclei, Q and proto-Mark) cease to be wholly incredible. Be that as it may, the reduction of the interval between the traditional date of Jesus and the date of the earliest Gospel story from something like a century to something like forty years makes an important difference to the question of his historicity.

[1] There was an intermediate Jewish revolt in 115–117. But " the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not " (Mark xiii, 14) implies that Judaea is a theatre of operations; and it is doubtful whether that was the case in 115–117. The " little apocalypse " in Mark is linked to the prophecy of the destruction of the temple in 70 (verses 1–4).

CHAPTER VII

JESUS: MYTH AND HISTORY

THE reader will perceive from the foregoing chapters that the mythicist and the historicist are each able to put up a very strong case.

The mythicist can claim that the Jesus of the Church is primarily a God, and therefore for the modern world, which has learnt to dispense with gods in the explanation of phenomena, a myth. He figures in the Gospels as a worker of miracles possible only to a God, stilling a storm, raising the dead, multiplying loaves and fishes, and the like, and he himself rises from the dead the third day. The Fourth Gospel explicitly says that he is God. The Pauline Epistles and the Apocalypse speak of him as a divine being. So, among the early Fathers, do Clement, Barnabas, Ignatius, Aristides, and Justin. Testimony other than Christian to the existence of Jesus is wanting in the first century; and second-century evidence cannot be shown to be independent of Christian sources. Christian literature so abounds in forgeries that none of it can be taken on trust. The teaching ascribed to Jesus is a farrago of plagiarisms from Jewish sources. The myth of a god who is put to death and rises again, the sacramental eating of the god, and many other features of the Gospel story, are common to the whole ancient world. Why suppose Jesus to be more historical than Osiris, Tammuz, Attis, Dionysus, or Mithra?

The historicist, on the other hand, claims that there is a salient difference between Jesus and these other saviour-gods. Jesus is not merely a God. Even for the Church he is God *and* man, and a man, moreover, who lived at a particular moment of history and in a particular Roman province. The Synoptic evangelists, whether they thought him God

or not, are careful not to call him so. The Pauline Epistles give him a human ancestry and human brothers. An important section of the early Church did not hold him to be God, but at most a man who by merit achieved divine sonship. This section produced the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, and *The Shepherd* of Hermas, and remained vocal in the East down to the fourth century, if not later.[1] Further, we have the remarkable fact that none of the ancient opponents of Christianity (Celsus, Hierocles, the Jewish rabbis) question the historicity of Jesus. They call him a bastard, an impostor, a malefactor, but not, as they surely would have done had it been plausible, a myth. The lack of first-century testimony is explicable if we bear in mind the destruction of anti-Christian works which took place after the victory of Christianity, and the mere accident to which we owe the preservation of the attack of Celsus. Lastly, early Christian literature, however unreliable it may be on matters of fact, often affords evidence of the historical situation in which its authors lived and wrote. The Synoptic tradition included a prophecy that Jesus would return in the lifetime of some who had heard him. Papias based his work on information collected from men who had met " the Lord's disciples." Such facts do not point to a mythical Jesus.

Each party to the controversy, while cogent in putting its own arguments, is weak in combating the other's. The mythicist seldom faces the crux of the eschatological prophecies ascribed to Jesus. The historicist seldom faces the crux of his deification by Paul. The two sides of the argument confront us like the antinomies in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* or like the ghost in *Hamlet*—

> " As the air, invulnerable,
> And our vain blows malicious mockery."

[1] It may have assisted in the rapid conversion of the East to Islam. See Renan, *Marc-Aurèle*, third edition, pp. 623, 632–633.

May not a solution of the dispute lie in recognition of the fact that the two parties are arguing on different subjects—that there are, indeed, two different Jesuses, a mythical and an historical, having nothing in common but the name, and that the two have been fused into one?

The Mythical Jesus. That "Joshua" was originally a divine name is a legitimate inference from the old song-fragment in Josh. x, 12–13, in which Joshua commands the sun and moon to stand still until the nation have avenged themselves on their enemies. The nearest parallel in Greek literature is in *Iliad* xviii, where the goddess Hera saves the Achaeans from defeat by commanding the sun to set. Ordering the sun and moon about is a divine, not a human job.

But of what god was Joshua the name? On this subject mythicists betray some confusion. J. M. Robertson and Dujardin interpret the name "Joshua" as "saviour" or "salvation."[1] This is inexact. "Jehoshua," "Joshua," or "Jeshua," means "Jahveh is deliverance" or "Jahveh saves." If this was originally a divine name it was surely a title of Jahveh himself. "Jahveh saves" can no more have been a separate god from Jahveh than Zeus Soter was a separate god from Zeus. In the old song-book of which Josh. x, 12–13 is a fragment Jahveh himself doubtless fought in human form, as the Greek gods do in the *Iliad*, and commanded the sun and moon to stand still till victory was won. Later writers got rid of the anthropomorphism by turning Joshua into a human hero and making Jahveh stop the sun and moon at his prayer; but until this metamorphosis was effected there is no evidence that "Joshua" was anything but a title of Jahveh.

There is no ground, then, for regarding Joshua as originally a saviour-god of the Tammuz type or as the centre of a secret cult which continued down the cen-

[1] J. M. Robertson, *Christianity and Mythology*, p. 107. Dujardin, *Ancient History of the God Jesus*, pp. 47–49.

turies until the Christian era. Had any section of Jews in the first century practised such a cult, and especially had it included human sacrifice, we should surely have heard of it. Tacitus, in his *Histories*, gives a bitterly hostile account of the Jews and rakes together all the charges against them which he possibly can.[1] They hold profane all that Romans hold sacred. They allow unions which Romans hold incestuous. They induce good-for-nothings to adopt Judaism, teaching them to despise the gods, their country, and their families. They allow no statues of kings or emperors. Their way of life is mean and squalid. And so on; but not a word about human sacrifice. On the contrary, Tacitus pays tribute to the loftiness of their monotheism; and there is no doubt that the tribute was deserved. Pre-exilic Israel and Judah, we know, were as idolatrous as their Semitic neighbours; but post-exilic Judaism was the religion of a book, and the religion of a book it remained. For the post-exilic Jews Joshua was a man; and the frequency with which they gave this name to their sons shows how completely they had forgotten its former divine connotation. To name a Jewish boy after a false god would have been a profanation; after the true God, a blasphemy.

There is no evidence that for any Jews of the first century Joshua was a divine name; but there is some evidence that it was a Messianic name. The Jewish idea of the Messiah (" anointed one ") assumes three forms. In the historical books of the Old Testament the " anointed of Jahveh " is simply the reigning king. When the Jews no longer had a king, but were vassals of the Babylonian, Persian, and Macedonian empires, anonymous prophecy applied the term to any leader who embodied for the time being the national hope of independence. In Isaiah xlv, 1, even the pagan Cyrus is called the " anointed " of Jahveh. As Jewish fortunes became progressively worse, and above all when the ephemeral independence achieved

[1] Tacitus, *Histories*, v, 4–5.

by the Hasmonaeans gave place to Roman domination, the Messianic hope became more and more tinged with supernaturalism. It was natural that at this stage some Jews should expect that Joshua, the hero who had led Israel into the promised land, would reappear to free them from the yoke of Rome. In fact two would-be Messiahs—Theudas, who about A.D. 45 undertook to lead a multitude over the Jordan dry-shod; and an Egyptian Jew who, between A.D. 52 and 58, promised his followers that the walls of Jerusalem should fall at his command—each in his different way assumed the role of Joshua. Further evidence is afforded by the Sibylline oracle quoted in Chapter IV, by the *Apocalypse of Ezra*, and perhaps by the title of " prince of the presence " bestowed on Joshua to this day in the Jewish new year liturgy.[1] The mythical Jesus, then, originated not in a sacrificial cult, but in the expectation of a Joshua *redivivus*.

Among the Greek-speaking Jews of the " dispersion," Messianism underwent a different evolution. Here the richer and better educated Jews came into contact with Greek philosophy, particularly that of Plato, who saw in abstract ideas the realities of which the material world was but a blurred copy; and that of the Stoics, who saw in reason (*logos*) the natural law governing both the material world and human society. To Greek-speaking Jews this seemed to agree with the Old Testament teaching that God had created the world by his word (in Greek also *logos*). Disinclined by economic interest to violent action, they looked for redemption from evil by the operation of *logos* rather than by armed upheaval. Gradually this conception percolated from the more to the less educated social strata, until the notion of *logos* merged with that of *Christos* (" anointed ") as the power to which men looked for deliverance. The fusion is complete in the *Odes of Solomon*; but whether they

[1] To J. M. Robertson (*The Jesus Problem*, p. 85; *Jesus and Judas*, p. 207) this is evidence of a pre-Christian cult of Joshua as a deity separate from Jahveh. *Non sequitur.*

belong to the last century B.C. or the first century A.D. is a matter of dispute.

But Jews of the "dispersion" were exposed to other influences than that of Greek philosophy. In cosmopolitan cities like Alexandria and Antioch they rubbed shoulders with votaries of the pagan mystery religions; and whatever the rabbis might wish, an exchange of ideas between Jew and Gentile could not altogether be avoided. Business dealings, employment as slaves in the same household, a common hatred of the Roman exploiter, would bring together the down-trodden Jew who expected salvation from the Messiah, and the down-trodden Egyptian, Syrian, Phrygian, or Greek, who expected it from Osiris, Tammuz, Attis, or Dionysus. To the pagan the Jewish Messiah would seem just another saviour-god, *Christos* or perhaps *Christos Iesous*. To the Jew the pagan would seem to have got hold of the Messianic idea and to have mixed it up with idolatry and other wrong notions. Yet some of these notions might not be so wrong. The notion, for example, that the Saviour, whoever he might be, had himself trodden the difficult way they were treading, had suffered the worst that the evil world could do to him, and had risen triumphant over it all—was that so wrong? What did the Psalms and the prophets say about it? He would look them up and think it over.

In this way the belief in a suffering Messiah may have taken shape. But there were other factors which must have helped to form it even more vividly. Too many mythicists weaken their own case by overlooking the fact that crucifixion in the ancient world was not a recondite piece of astral or other symbolism, but a chronic contemporary horror. The hideous mode of capital punishment by binding, nailing, or impaling the victim on a stake or cross and leaving him to die, was common to all the ancient slave-empires and was used in the Roman Empire for criminals who were not Roman citizens. It was not a Jewish practice; but the Hasmonaean king Alexander Jannaeus shocked

Jewish feeling by crucifying eight hundred rebel Pharisees and having their wives and children slain before their eyes. There may be an allusion to this in the description in the *Wisdom of Solomon* (written not long after) of the ungodly who outrage and torture the righteous man and condemn him to a shameful death.[1] Later, unsuccessful revolts against Rome led to the crucifixion of thousands of Jews. With such examples before them people had no need to go to mythology or to the *Republic* of Plato or to the "intersecting lines of the equator and the ecliptic"[2] to get the idea of a crucified saviour. The exploited masses of the ancient world were held down by the terror of the cross. What could be more natural than to suppose that the supernatural being to whom they looked for deliverance had himself endured the cross and shown the way to conquer it?

Thus before the rise of historic Christianity there was already forming in the Mediterranean underworld a body of Gnostic doctrine, half Jewish, half pagan, according to which a redeemer-deity, who after suffering had triumphed over the demon rulers of this dark world, would help those who accepted his revelation to triumph as he had done and to attain eternal happiness in a world of light.

The Historical Jesus. Historic Christianity differs from the mystery religions which preceded it in identifying the Saviour with a Jew crucified by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judaea in the reign of the emperor Tiberius.

We have seen that the myth theory as stated by J. M. Robertson does not exclude the possibility of an historical Jesus. "A teacher or teachers named

[1] Wisdom ii, 12-20.

[2] According to Rylands (*The Beginnings of Gnostic Christianity*, p. 217) the transit of the sun over the equinoctial point in spring and autumn occupies "three days": hence the interval between the crucifixion and the resurrection. The sun's apparent diameter being approximately half a degree, a short calculation will show that the real time of transit over the equinoctial point is about twelve hours.

Jesus" may have uttered some of the Gospel sayings "at various periods." [1] The Jesus ben-Pandera of the Talmud may have led a movement round which the survivals of an ancient solar or other cult gradually clustered.[2] It is even "not very unlikely that there were several Jesuses who claimed to be Messiahs." [3] The founder of the movement may have met his death by preaching a subversive political doctrine, and the facts may have been suppressed by later writers.[4] A Galilean faith-healer named Jesus may have been offered as a human sacrifice by fanatical peasants at some time of social tumult.[5] These are important concessions. Robertson offers us a liberal choice of historical Jesuses, indeed an *embarras de richesse*. All he stipulates is that we shall not pretend that the discourses of such a Jesus are accurately reproduced in the Gospels, that we shall admit a preponderant element of fiction, and that we shall on no account presume to label such a Jesus a Personality or a Figure or anything else with a big letter. Any Rationalist in these days should be able to promise so much. If that is the only issue between mythicist and historicist, the path of the peacemaker is easy.

The arguments of Conybeare, Klausner, Eisler, Goguel, and Howell Smith set forth in the last chapter, when critically sifted and freed from such lumber as the Old Russian Josephus, render it likely that *one* starting-point of the Gospel story was the existence, at or about the date traditionally assigned, of a Jewish Messianic claimant bearing the common name of Joshua or Jesus, a member of the sect of Nazoraeans or Nazarenes, who was crucified as a rebel by Pilate, and whose followers were sufficiently fanatical to believe that he still lived and would soon return to establish the Messianic kingdom.[6]

[1] J. M. Robertson, *Christianity and Mythology*, p. 125.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 284–285.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 287.
[4] *The Historical Jesus*, p. 56.
[5] *Jesus and Judas*, pp. 205–206.
[6] Stories that dead men are still alive occur again and again in history and need no explanation. But they do not suffice to

To expect certainty is to misunderstand the conditions of historical inquiry. But this caution cuts both ways. It is just as foolish to assume, with some mythicists, that everything in the Gospels which *might* have been invented *was* invented, as it is to assume with some historicists that everything which *might* have happened *did* happen. It may reasonably be urged that no Christian in his senses would have fabricated a prophecy that Jesus would return in the lifetime of people who had seen him if Jesus had never lived and nobody had seen him, or if he had lived so long ago that nobody who had seen him could possibly be alive. It may reasonably be urged that no Christian who valued a quiet life would invent a story that the founder of his sect had been crucified by a Roman governor as a political offender if no such stigma really attached to the cult. And it may reasonably be urged that if Jesus had been simply and solely a myth, sharp Jewish rabbis and pagan critics of the calibre of Celsus would have drawn attention to that fact instead of adopting the tactics they did.

These considerations render it probable that there was an historical Jesus and that he lived about the date usually assigned and not a hundred years earlier or later.[1] But they leave the vital contention of the myth theory unaffected. The Jesus they establish is not, except within narrow limits, the Jesus of the Gospels. The admission of his existence does not accredit the Sermon on the Mount, the parables, or the miracles. Still less is he the Jesus of the Epistles, the Apocalypse, the Church, or the creeds. The Jesus of Christian tradition is a fusion of myth and history. It remains to be seen how that fusion came about.

found a religion. In this case the story lived on because it became fused with a myth of different origin.

[1] The Jews had an obvious motive for dating Jesus a hundred years earlier. They thus countered the Christian argument that the catastrophe of A.D. 70 was a punishment for their rejection of Jesus.

Fusion of Opposites. On the one hand, then, we have Messianism—the expectation, radiating from Palestine, of a heaven-sent deliverer from Roman rule, identified by many with Joshua, and by some with an individual of that very name lately crucified by Pilate, but believed to be alive. On the other hand we have Gnosticism—a cult originating in the Jewish " dispersion," having as its central figure a saviour-deity with the Jewish Messianic titles of *Christos Iesous*, but interpreting them in a mystical sense and favouring political quietism. These two movements, starting respectively from Palestine and from the " dispersion," were bound to meet and to be at cross-purposes.

To write the history of their encounter presupposes an accurate dating of the books of the New Testament. I have attempted that task elsewhere.[1] If the Pauline Epistles, or even the four chief Epistles (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians), are genuine as they stand, including the references to the brothers of Jesus and to his birth " of the seed of David according to the flesh," [2] it would follow not only that the two movements had met, but that their fusion had begun in the time of Paul. It is difficult, however, to defend the integrity of the Epistles as they stand. Goguel, who regards nine of them as authentic, admits that they exhibit dissimilar views which cannot be welded together into a logical whole. Surely it is better to admit at once that the Epistles are composite. It is as unlikely that Paul should have identified a contemporary Jew, who had a family of brothers, with " the power of God and the wisdom of God," [3] " the first-born of all creation," [4] as that he should have alternately thundered and winked at the eating of meat sacrificed to idols, or that he should in one chapter have allowed women to " prophesy " with their heads veiled, and in another have forbidden them to speak in the church at all.

Once we admit that the Pauline Epistles, even the

[1] See *The Bible and its Background.*
[2] Rom. i, 3. [3] 1 Cor. i, 24. [4] Col. i, 15.

cardinal four, are a patchwork it becomes possible to see in Paul (as Rylands does) a Gnostic missionary who, even if he knew anything of a Messiah executed in Palestine, cared nothing for him or his followers. This explains why Paul never mentions the teaching of Jesus, never uses the term "Nazarene," never cites the Palestinian apostles as authorities for any fact or doctrine, and indeed never acknowledges any authority or any informant but Jesus himself. Paul had nothing to do with the Nazarenes or their Messiah. His Jesus is a totally different being—a divine Saviour to whom believers are united in baptism and by whom they are strengthened in life and will live again after death.

But the Pauline Epistles afford evidence of an early clash between this doctrine and another. We read of divisions in the Churches; of people who oppose Paul and preach "another Jesus, whom we did not preach;" [1] of "false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ"; [2] of anathemas on those who preach "a different gospel." [3] These opponents pride themselves on being Hebrews, Israelites, the seed of Abraham, and in a special sense "ministers of Christ." [4] If we still have any doubt of their identity, it is removed when we meet with a sarcastic reference to "those who were reputed to be somewhat (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth not man's person)— . . . James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars," [5] followed by a scathing attack on Cephas and James for making the observance of Jewish dietary rules a condition of Church membership. Whether these polemics are by Paul himself or, as seems more likely, by a Pauline partisan writing after his death, they at least show that there was an acrid rivalry between the Pauline and Petrine parties, and that the Pauline party cared less

[1] 2 Cor. xi, 4.
[2] *Ibid.*, 13.
[3] Gal. i, 6–9.
[4] 2 Cor. xi, 22–23.
[5] Gal. ii, 6–9.

than nothing for the claim of their opponents to be the special depositaries of Messianic teaching.

This rivalry continued after Paul's death and after the destruction of Jerusalem, in A.D. 70. In those days, when fugitives from Palestine, distraught by the horrors they had witnessed, were to be found in every Mediterranean city, stories began to circulate about the Nazarene Messiah of a generation ago. He had been a prophet mighty in word and deed, who preached good tidings to the poor and hungry. He had come to set up the kingdom of God. Like fools, they had rejected him and let the Romans crucify him; but he was not dead, and when he was least expected, he would return. He had foretold that Jerusalem would be desolate, and that all the blood shed on earth would be avenged on this generation; and so it was. That proved him a true prophet. Watch!

In the underworld of the Roman Empire this kind of thing could be highly inflammatory. The Pauline leaders, who did not want trouble with Rome, countered it by circulating their own gospel. They adopted and made their own the story of the Nazarene Messiah and his crucifixion by Pilate, which it would have been useless to deny; but they censored the discourses, suggested that Jesus had deliberately veiled his meaning and that his followers were too stupid to understand him, and rewrote the story of the crucifixion in such a way as to transfer the onus from Pilate to the Jews. This document, with some later amplification, became our Gospel according to Mark. The work of fusion had begun.

It was assisted by economic factors. The fanatics who hoped for the establishment of the kingdom of God on the ruins of the Roman Empire were for the most part desperately poor. The Pauline party, whose theology appealed to a more educated stratum, had money, but found it difficult to gain mass support. By using their money to relieve destitute Messianists they could win converts to the Pauline gospel and draw the teeth of revolution. That is the basis of

fact underlying the story of Paul's journey to Jerusalem with alms for the "poor saints." The same fact, differently viewed, has been thought to underlie the story, in the Acts, of the attempt of Simon Magus to buy the office of an apostle for money and of his stinging rebuke by Peter. That a party in the Church who never whole-heartedly accepted Paul's apostleship attacked him under the name of Simon Magus is well known from the third-century *Clementine Homilies.*

By the end of the first century the lines on which amalgamation was to proceed were marked out. The Pauline party accepted the historical Jesus who had suffered under Pontius Pilate; the Petrine party accepted the mystical Jesus of Pauline theology. The fusion was the easier since, as we have seen, the figure of the Messiah had long since assumed markedly supernatural attributes. In the Apocalypse, written before the fusion and strongly anti-Pauline, but emanating from Asia Minor, not Palestine, the Messiah has no human feature. But this work is off the main line of development. In the new synthesis the union of the Petrine and Pauline Churches is symbolized by the identification of the human and the divine Jesus.[1]

We may observe successive literary stages in this fusion of opposites. In the Epistle to the Hebrews an essentially divine being is given a few human traits (Jewish descent, temptation, fear of death) which do not really convince. Similarly, in the final edition of the Pauline Epistles, certain human touches are added of which the only result is gruity of the juxtaposition. thew and Luke the discours are put back into the sto

[1] Docetism, sometimes erron of the myth theory, was really reconcile their doctrine of the historical existence of Jesus. Jesus had lived, but they denied that his body was real.

and amplifying them in his own fashion. Jesus is provided with a Jewish pedigree, different in the two Gospels; but a later editor stultifies the pedigree by ascribing to him a virgin birth after the pattern of pagan demigods. Primitive crudities overlooked by Mark are smoothed out; and the story of the resurrection is amplified by discrepantly corroborative details. Finally the fourth evangelist ignores the pedigree, the virgin birth, and the Synoptic discourses and writes an almost wholly new Gospel round the theme of the *logos* made flesh.

All four Gospels seem to have been in existence in the first quarter of the second century; but it was long before they achieved canonical authority to the exclusion of rival productions. In the second quarter of the century it was still possible for Papias to disparage written Gospels in favour of oral tradition collected from men who had met " disciples of the Lord," and for Marcion, by resolutely weeding out all that savoured of Judaism, to produce and put into circulation a Gospel agreeable to his ultra-Pauline theology. Not until the last quarter of the second century, in Irenaeus, do we meet the dogma that there must be four Gospels, and no more than four.

Jesus, then, is a myth. The story of the God-man is a literary creation, refashioned (as Celsus pointed out in the second century) " three times, four times, and many times " in the interest of the movement which evolved it. The Gospels owe their vitality, not to the divine majesty or to the human genius of their hero, but to those men and women of the first and second centuries who in the faithless, hopeless, and loveless environment of a great slave-empire made them the medium of their frustrated aspirations to freedom, equality, and brotherhood. The religion they created has ossified into a dead dogma; and our world—partly by breaking the dogma—has found other media. Yet in all but the veriest Philistines these memorials of a once living past must waken a responsive echo.

But Jesus is also history. To explain the story in terms of myth, and only myth, raises more difficulties than it solves. A sound hypothesis must account for *all* the facts; and it is easier to account for them if we suppose that a real Jesus was crucified by Pilate than if we do not. We know next to nothing about this Jesus. He is not the founder of anything that we can recognize as Christianity. He is a mere postulate of historical criticism—a dead leader of a lost cause, to whom sayings could be credited and round whom a legend could be written. He contributed one element, and only one, to the myth of the God-man. Had he never lived, the Christian creed would have evolved very much as we know it, but Pontius Pilate would not have been immortalized. There are thousands of men and women of whom we know more than we do of Jesus. But there are millions of whom we know as little or less; and it is the unknown millions who make history.

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