

Paul, indeed, proclaims [*se réclame du*] an immortal Christ, or more exactly a Christ dead and re-arisen, *not the Jesus preaching the evangel in Galilee and at Jerusalem*. But his attitude is easy to explain.....He was aware of the circumstances of the death of Christ, and of what was preached by his followers.....If he boasted of having learned nothing from the old [*sic*] apostles, it was that, in reality, he had never been at their school.....But he was able [*il lui arrive*] also to affirm the conformity of his teaching with theirs: that is what he did in the passage.....touching the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul converted had nothing to demand of the first apostles of Jesus, because he knew already what they had preached.<sup>1</sup>

So that the doctrine of an immortal or resurrected Christ was the sole doctrine of the Apostles. There was no other evangel. And this doctrine, which had just been declared to be born of the *personal* impression made by Jesus on his followers, is also the doctrine of Paul, who had never seen Jesus.

The primary evangel having thus simply disappeared, we revert to the Jesuine Teaching (addressed in large part only to the disciples) which had formed among disciples and adherents such a "religious life" as served to develop the conviction that the Master could not really die, and so prepared the foundation upon which Paul built historic Christianity.<sup>2</sup> We have seen how M. Loisy vacillates over the Founder's conception of the Kingdom of God in relation to his moral teaching. When it is a question of a myth theory, M. Loisy insists upon exactitude. "In order that the thesis should be

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* pp. 296-97.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 314.

sustainable, it would be necessary that a *well-defined* myth should have existed in some Jewish sect."<sup>1</sup> But there is no call for well-defined proofs or notions when it is a question of defending the tradition. For our critic, Jesus is first and foremost an intense believer in a miraculous advent of that Kingdom which had come simply to mean "the sovereignty of God."<sup>2</sup> Even this conception is of necessity vague to the last degree:—

The primitive nationalism subsisted at least in the framework [*cadre*] and the exterior economy of the kingdom of God; it maintained itself also in [*jusque dans*] the evangel of Jesus. At the same time the kingdom of God is not a simple moral reform, to safeguard the law of the celestial Sovereign and guarantee the happiness of the faithful. The action of Yahweh.....governs the entire universe..... [The cosmological tradition] developed the idea of a definite triumph of light over darkness, of order over chaos, a triumph which was to be the final victory of good over evil.....The terrestrial kingdoms..... were to disappear, to give place to the reign of Israel, which was the reign of the just, the reign of God. In this great instauration of the divine order, in this regeneration of the universe, the divine justice was to manifest itself by the resurrection of all the true faithful.<sup>3</sup>

This transformation, then—the long current dream of Jewry—was to be a vast miracle, and in that miracle Jesus believed he was to play the part of the Messiah, the divine representative. That expect-

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 280.

<sup>2</sup> So Dalman (*The Words of Jesus*, p. 94 sq.), as well as Loisy. They agree that "kingdom of heaven" was only a more reverent way of saying the same thing. (*Jésus et la tradition*, p. 128.)

<sup>3</sup> *Jésus et la tradition*, pp. 125-26.

tation sustained him till the moment of his death.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless "his idea of the reign of God was not a patriotic hallucination or the dream of an excited [*exalté*] mystic. The reign of God is the reign of justice."<sup>2</sup> (As if the second sentence proved the first.) And yet, all the while: "On the whole, the Gospel ethic is no more consistent than the hope of the kingdom.....Considered in themselves, as the Gospel makes them known to us, *they are not mythic, but mystic.*"<sup>3</sup>

Thus helped to a definite conception, we turn to the ethic, which we have seen to be in the main a compilation from Jewish literature. This fact M. Loisy admits, only to deny that it has any significance:—

He opposes the voice of his conscience to the tradition of the doctors. There lies precisely the originality of his teaching, which, if one recomposed the materials piece by piece, could be found scattered in the Biblical writings or in the sayings of the rabbis. *Like every man who speaks to men, Jesus takes his ideas in the common treasure of his environment and his time; but as to what he makes of it [pour le parti qu'il en tire] one does not say that it proceeds from any one. This independence results, probably, at once from his character and from the circumstances of his education.*<sup>4</sup>

Thus, as regards the Sermon on the Mount, the act of collecting a number of ethical precepts and maxims from the current literature and lore of one's people and curtly enouncing them, without

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 105. Cp. p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> *Apropos d'histoire des religions*, p. 287.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* pp. 288-89.

<sup>4</sup> *Jésus et la tradition*, p. 136.

development, is a proof of supreme moral originality, and is to be regarded as opposing the voice of one's conscience to tradition. Had the rabbis, then, no conscience? Was their ethic a mere tradition, even when they gave out or originated the maxims of the Sermon on the Mount? Was Hillel but a mouth-piece of the law? M. Loisy must in justice pardon us for avowing that so far he has but duplicated a worn-out paralogism, and that he has evaded the plain documentary fact that the Sermon is a literary compilation,<sup>1</sup> and not a discourse at all.

And when we turn to specific teachings, his commentary does but compel us to ask how the teaching which he insists upon taking as genuinely uttered by the Teacher can be associated with the Messianist he has been describing. Accepting as genuine the story of the woman taken in adultery, now bracketed in the English Revised Version as being absent from the most ancient manuscripts, but presumably found in the lost Gospel of the Hebrews,<sup>2</sup> he remarks that "the elect of the kingdom must not use marriage; they were to be as the angels in heaven";<sup>3</sup> and at the same time he describes the veto on divorce as "a trait so personal to the teaching of Christ, and so difficult to comprehend if one denies all originality to that teaching."<sup>4</sup> That is to say, the believer in the speedy end of all marriage relations, and the

<sup>1</sup> Schmiedel pronounces it a "conglomerate." *Encyc. Bib. art. GOSPELS*, col. 1,886.

<sup>2</sup> See Nicholson, *The Gospel according to the Hebrews*, 1879, p. 52 sq.

<sup>3</sup> *Jésus et la tradition*, p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> *Id. ib.* and *Apropos d'histoire des religions*, p. 288.

establishment of a new and angelic life for all who survive, occupied himself earnestly with the restriction or abolition of divorce!

At other junctures M. Loisy is ready to see how the doctrines of sections and movements in the later Christian Church were introduced into the Gospels. He will not admit of such an explanation here. Does he then see a supreme moral inspiration in the Montanists and other Christian sectaries who set their faces against the sexual instinct? Has he forgotten the text in Malachi (ii, 14-16), vetoing a heartless divorce? And has he never heard of the saying of Rabbi Eliezer, echoed elsewhere in the Talmud, that the altar sheds tears over him who puts away his first wife? Is the moral originality of the Gospel teaching to be established by merely ignoring all previous teaching to the same effect?

But it is hardly necessary thus to revert to the question of the ethical originality of the Gospel teaching: the essential issue here is the impossible combination presented to us by M. Loisy as his historical Jesus. Without any sign of misgiving he offers us the figure of a mystic awaiting the imminent end of the old order of things and the substitution of a new and heavenly order, doubled with a moralist deeply preoccupied over certain details of the vanishing life and a prescription for their regulation in the future in which they were not to exist. M. Loisy is, indeed, liable to be censured by the orthodox and the "liberals" alike for his explicit avowal that "It is very superfluous

to seek in the Gospel a doctrine of social economy, or even a program of moral conduct for individual existences which were to go on according to the order of nature, in the indefinite sequence of humanity."<sup>1</sup> This seems to overlook the passage (Mt. xxv, 34-46) in which eternal life is promised to those who succour the distressed. Such a rule for conduct does seem to indicate some regard for the continuance of life on the normal lines. It is, we know, a simple adaptation from the ritual of the Egyptian BOOK OF THE DEAD, but it has had from many commentators even such praise for "originality" as M. Loisy has bestowed on the Teaching in general.

Such teaching is, in point of fact, quite undeserving of praise for "spirituality," inasmuch as it in effect recommends benevolence as a way of securing eternal life. He who succours the distressed on the motive so supplied is plainly a long way below the Good Samaritan or the simple compassionate human being of everyday life. But this is really the ground-note of all the Gospel ethic. The Beatitudes are promises of compensatory bliss; and, indeed, in a system which founds upon immortality there is no escape from this kind of motivation. The Pagan appeal, made alternately to nobleness and to concern for good repute among one's fellows, is clearly on the higher plane, and would tend to maintain, so far as mere moral appeal can, a nobler type of human being. It is not even clear, in the light of

<sup>1</sup> *Jésus et la tradition*, p. 141.

the general Judaism of the doctrine of the Kingdom, whether "one of these my brethren" can mean more than "one of the faith."

But however that may be, we have to note that for M. Loisy the promise of reward at the judgment for help given to the distressed is not a Jesuine utterance. It occurs only in Matthew; and we may readily agree that, if such an allocution were really delivered by the alleged Founder, it could not conceivably have been left to one collector to preserve it. "The redactor of the first Gospel," comments M. Loisy in his best critical vein, "thought he ought to put this here to complete his collection of instructions concerning the *parousia* and the great judgment. It is.....a piece in which is developed, from the point of view of the last judgment, the word of the Lord: 'He that receiveth you receiveth me.'" So that a teaching which still makes a great impression on the Christian consciousness is confessedly but a development by an unknown hand of a bare Messianic phrase. "It has been visibly arranged to close the compilation of discourses and parables made here by the redactor of the first Gospel."<sup>1</sup>

Yet when we come to the parable of the Good Samaritan, which occurs only in Luke, and which also cannot be conceived as being deliberately omitted by the previous evangelists if it had been uttered by the Master, M. Loisy indulges in a very long discourse that reads like a preserved sermon,

<sup>1</sup> *Les évangiles synoptiques*, ii, 482-83.

only to conclude that "the parable of the Samaritan thus offers itself as one of the most authentic testimonies [*un témoignage authentique entre tous*] of the teaching of Jesus. It is clear that the evangelist has not invented it, but that he has found it ready made, and that he has only given it a frame, in his fashion."<sup>1</sup> It is with a certain embarrassment over the spectacle of a good scholar's divagation that one proceeds to point to the absolute *non sequitur* in M. Loisy's comment. Supposing we agree that the evangelist found the parable ready made, wherein is this case differentiated from that of the passage in Matthew last noted? That is at least as likely to have been found ready made; yet it is not in that case claimed by M. Loisy that the passage is therefore a record of a real Jesuine utterance. He sees that it is a "patch," a development.

Now, the parable of the Good Samaritan is a plain documentary "patch," an insertion without context, between the address of Jesus to the disciples after that to the returned Seventy (whose mission M. Loisy had somewhat nervously dismissed as the evangelist's "figurative frame for the evangelizing of the pagans"<sup>2</sup>) and the resumption: "Now, as they went on their way....." It is impossible to imagine a more palpable insertion. First the mythic Seventy, the creation of a Gentilizing Christian, make their report on the exact lines of the report of the Twelve; then Jesus addresses

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* ii, 357.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* i, 152.



them; then he "rejoices in the Holy Spirit." Then, "turning to the disciples, he said *privately*, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see....." This last suggests an earlier allocution to the Twelve which has had to be turned into a "private" speech to them to distinguish it from the reply to the Seventy.<sup>1</sup> But however that may be, the natural sequel is verse 38, "Now, as they went on their way....." And it is between these points of natural connection that we get the parable episode beginning: "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tempted him....."

Well may M. Loisy say that the episode is a thing "found ready made"; it has certainly no place in the original document. But it was "made" by a later hand, and it was inserted either by him who made it or by him who "found" it. It is the work of a Gentilizer, aiming at Jewish priests and Levites, and in a less degree at the scribes, whom he treats as comparatively open to instruction. It is part of the Gentilizing propaganda which evolved the story of the mission of the Seventy, and it is naturally inserted after that episode. But to admit *that* to be a work of redaction and to call the parable a genuine Jesuine utterance is only to give one more distressing illustration of the common collapse of the simplest principles of documentary criticism under the sway of conservative prepossession. M. Loisy retains the parable of the Good Samaritan as Jesuine simply because he feels that

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 127.

to abandon it is to come near making an end of the claim for the moral originality of the Gospels. It is probably from a Gentile hand, though it may conceivably have come from an enlightened Jew.

And so we find M. Loisy, with all his scholarly painstaking and his laudable measure of candour, presenting us finally with an uncritical result. His historical Jesus will not cohere. It is a blend of early Judaic eschatology with later ethical common sense, early Judaic humanity and particularism with later Gentile universalism ; even as the Gospels are a mosaic of a dozen other diverging and conflicting tendencies, early and late. "One can explain to oneself Jesus," exclaims M. Loisy ; "one cannot explain to oneself those who invented him."<sup>1</sup> Let the reader judge for himself whether M. Loisy has given us any explanation ; and whether, after our survey, there is any scientific difficulty in the conception of an imaginary personage produced, like an ideal photograph resulting from a whole series of superimposed portraits, by the continued travail of generations of men variously bent on picturing a Messiah for their hopes, a God for their salvation, and a Teacher for their lives.

<sup>1</sup> *Apropos d'histoire des religions*, p. 290.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE PAULINE PROBLEM

How much M. Loisy is swayed by prepossession may be further gathered from his argumentation over the "testimony of Paul" in connection with his criticism of the myth theory. Professor Drews, he remarks, does not follow those who contest the authenticity of the Epistles, "though the interest of his thesis imperiously demands it"; and again: "Paul is a dangerous witness for the mythic hypothesis."<sup>1</sup>

It may be worth while for me here to note that a study of the Pauline epistles, on the view that "the four" were probably genuine in the main, was a determining factor in my own resort to the mythical hypothesis. The critical situation created by realizing that Paul practically knew nothing of the Gospel narratives save the detachable item of the resurrection was for me almost exactly analogous to that created by realizing that the Israel of the Book of Judges knew nothing of the Pentateuchal life in the wilderness. So far from being a witness against the myth theory, the Pauline literature was one of the first clear grounds for that theory. The school of Van Manen can realize, what M. Loisy

<sup>1</sup> *Apropos d'histoire des religions*, pp. 291, 304.

cannot, that the spuriousness of the whole Pauline literature, so far from being "imperiously required" by the myth theory, sets up for that a certain complication.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, Van Manen took exactly the converse view to that of M. Loisy:—

He was at bottom a man of conservative character, and it was only with great reluctance that he found himself compelled to abandon the Paul consecrated by tradition. But when, as a man of science, he had once made this sacrifice to his convictions, his belief in an historical Jesus received a fresh accession of strength; now at length the existence of Jesus had become probable. If the letters were written a century later than the time when Jesus lived, then his deification in the Pauline letters ceases to be so astonishing.<sup>2</sup>

Decidedly M. Loisy had been somewhat superficial in his estimate of the tendencies of the argument over Paul. Now, the myth theory, as it happens, is neither made nor marred by any decision as to the spuriousness of the Pauline letters. The crucial point is that, whether early or late—and the dating of them as pseudepigrapha is a difficult matter—the cardinal epistles *have been interpolated*. This became clear to me at an early stage in my studies, independently of any previous criticism. That the two passages, 1 Cor. xi, 23–28; xv, 3–11, are interpolations, and that in the second case *the interpolation has been added to*, are as clear results of pure documentary analysis as any in the

<sup>1</sup> Dr. G. A. van den Bergh van Eysinga, *Radical Views about the New Testament*, Eng. tr. 1912, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* pp. 101–2.

whole field of the discussion.<sup>1</sup> And when M. Loisy ascribes to Professor Drews an "entirely gratuitous hypothesis of interpolation," and implies that such hypotheses are set up because the texts are "extremely awkward for the mythic theory,"<sup>2</sup> he is himself misled by his *parti pris*. Whereas I came to my conclusions<sup>3</sup> as to interpolation while working towards the myth theory, exactly the same conclusions as mine, I afterwards found, had been previously reached by at least one continental scholar<sup>4</sup> who had not the mythic theory in view; and later by others<sup>5</sup> who equally stood aloof from it. M. Loisy would do well to ask himself whether it is not he who is uncritically swayed by his presuppositions, and whether the men to whom he imputes such bias are not the really disinterested critics.

In regard to the text of 1 Cor. xv, 3 *sq.*, he describes as surprising the argument that the account of the appearance of Jesus to "five hundred at once" is shown to be late by its absence from the Gospels. This very silence of the evangelists, he insists, "renders unplausible [*invraisemblable*] the entirely gratuitous hypothesis of an interpolation."<sup>6</sup> One is driven to wonder what conception M. Loisy has formed of the manner of the compila-

<sup>1</sup> See *Christianity and Mythology*, 2nd ed. pp. 341, 357.

<sup>2</sup> *À propos d'histoire des religions*, p. 294.

<sup>3</sup> First published in 1886.

<sup>4</sup> J. W. Straatman, in *Critical Studies on First Corinthians*, 1863-65, cited by Mr. Whittaker.

<sup>5</sup> W. Seufert, *Der Ursprung und die Bedeutung des Apostolates*, 1887, p. 46; Sir G. W. Cox, lect. in *Religious Systems of the World*, 3rd ed. p. 242.

<sup>6</sup> *À propos d'histoire des religions*, p. 295.

tion of the Gospels. On his view, Paul had very early put in currency the record that the risen Jesus had appeared to "above five hundred brethren at once"; yet this record, so welcome to the Church, was never inserted in the Gospels. Why not? In M. Loisy's opinion, one of them, at least, was penned or redacted in the Pauline interest:—

One may *without doubt*.....affirm that the oldest of the synoptics, the Gospel of Mark, was composed, in a certain measure, in favour of Paul.....The same Gospel seems to have the conscious purpose of lowering the Galilean disciples to the advantage of Paul and his disciples.<sup>1</sup>

And while M. Loisy justly rejects, as opposed to the internal evidence, the claim that "Luke" is the intimate of Paul, and even denies that the third Gospel is really Pauline in tendency,<sup>2</sup> he will hardly say that it is anti-Pauline, or likely on that or any other score to repel an important item of testimony to the appearances of the risen Jesus, supplied by such an authority as the Apostle to the Gentiles. He can give no reason whatever, then, why the "five hundred" item should appear neither in Gospels nor Acts. It is in point of fact to be taken as a very late interpolation indeed. And if M. Loisy, as in duty bound, would but note the sequence: "then to *the twelve*; then.....to above five hundred..... then to *all the apostles*," he might, as simple critic, see that there have been successive tamperings.

As to the genuineness and the dating of the

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> *Les évangiles*, i, 172, 173. Contrast the case put long ago by Zeller, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Eng. tr. 1875, i, 129-30.

epistles, it may be well at this point to put the issue clearly. The general case of Van Manen is decidedly strong; and the entire absence from the Acts of any mention of any public epistle by Paul is all in Van Manen's favour. The Epistle to the Romans is so far dissolved under criticism that it might be classed as neither Pauline nor an epistle.<sup>1</sup> That there are late literary elements in the rest of the cardinal "four" I have myself argued,<sup>2</sup> independently of the question of the interpolations of quasi-history. For a free historical student there can be no primary question of how the dating of the epistles will affect the problem of the historicity of Jesus: the problem is to be scientifically solved on its merits. But while the school of Van Manen fail to recognize interpolations in the epistles as they stand, and to revise their chronology in the light of that fact, they are postponing the critical settlement. That the rejection of all the Pauline epistles as pseudographic is not at all a counter stroke to the myth theory is shown by Mr. Whittaker's definite acceptance of both positions. Van Manen was premature on the historicity question.

Assuredly there is much to be done before the myth theory can be reduced to a definitive scientific form. It is to be hoped that, free as it is from perverting commitments, it may be developed rather more rapidly than the "liberal" theory of the human

<sup>1</sup> Compare, however, the elaborate essay of Prof. G. A. Deissmann, in his *Bible Studies* (Eng. tr. 1901), on "Letters and Epistles," p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Short History of Christianity*, 2nd ed. p. 4.

Christ, which has been on the stocks for over a hundred years without securing any higher measure of unanimity than exists among the Christian sects. But it can have no rapid acceptance. Questions of myth analogies—always open to the perverse handling of men who cannot or will not see that in mythology and anthropology claims of analogy are not claims of derivation—are apt to be obscure at best; and the establishment of the hypothesis of a pre-Christian Jesus cult has been admitted from the outset to be difficult. And the sociological history of the rise of Christianity, to which the myth question is but preparatory, has still to be written.

In this direction too there may be complications. Pastor Kalthoff's very important treatise on *THE RISE OF CHRISTIANITY* puts the theory that the Church began as a communistic body; and Karl Kautsky, in his *DER URSPRUNG DES CHRISTENTHUMS* (1908), has vigorously developed that conception. It has some strong grounds, and it is beset by very serious difficulties, which Kautsky, I think, has not met. When he denies that there were Hellenistic experiments and propagandas which in a later period could have set some Christian enthusiasts upon inventing a communistic beginning for the Church, he seems to ignore his own argument from the Epistle of James, and evidence which he could have found in Kalthoff. But unless the communistic theory (adumbrated long ago in De Quincey's rash thesis that the Essenes were the first Christians) is pressed as giving the *whole* origin of



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Christianity, it remains a part rather of the sociological problem than of the hierological inquiry. And I do not think that Kalthoff, had he lived, would have so pressed it. He saw, I think, that there is a primary *religious* factor and problem, and that the other is secondary. There was a sacramental cult before there could be any communism. When the origin of the cult is made fairly clear the question of communism may be settled. But the Acts is a very dubious basis for a historical theory, and the Epistle of James tells rather of Ebionism than of communism. The history of the Ebionites and the Nazarenes, which for me was one of the points of reversion to a myth theory, seems to be the true starting point for the history of the Church.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE HISTORY OF THE DISCUSSION

IN all things, finally, one must be prepared for a boundless operation of the spirit of controversy, which is as it were the atmosphere of intellectual progress, and, like the physical atmosphere, is traversed by much dust, many gusts, and many persistent currents. An infinite quantity of mere insolence and mere personal aspersion arises round every problem that disturbs widespread prejudice: we have seen some of it even in a survey which aims solely at bringing out the main arguments on our issue. And where a body of doctrine is related to an economic foundation, controversy is sure to be specially protracted.

This has already been abundantly seen in the development of the "liberal" view of the human Christ, of which M. Loisy may be taken as an advanced representative; while Professor Schmiedel may rank as an exponent too advanced to be otherwise than suspect for some of the school. It is instructive to realize that M. Loisy stands to-day very much where Strauss did eighty years ago. What was then revolutionary heresy is now become a very respectable form of professional theology. Only in his old age did Strauss himself realize to

what philosophical conclusions his critical method led; and on the historicity question he seems to have made no serious advance at all. Challenged by Ullmann to say whether, on his theory, the Church created the Christ of the Gospels or he the Church, Strauss replied that the alternative was false, and that both things had happened; the Christ being created by the faith of the Church, which faith in turn was created by the person of the historical Jesus. From that gyratory position he never really departed; and that is the position of M. Loisy to-day.

If it has taken eighty years to yield only that amount of progress, through a whole library of laborious scholarly literature, there can be no great weight left in the appeal to scholarly authority. The authority of to-day is the heretic of our grandfathers' day. It is for the radical innovator, on the other hand, to learn the lesson which was not duly learned by his predecessors, unless it be that in some cases they were merely silenced by orthodox hostility. While many Freethinkers, probably, had come privately to the view of those intimates of Bolingbroke who are referred to by Voltaire as denying the historicity of Jesus, the two writers who first gave European vogue to the proposition, Dupuis and Volney, staked everything on the astronomical elements of the cult, and on the chief myth-analogies with Pagan religions. Their argument was both sound and important, so far as it went; but for lack of investigation on the Jewish side of the problem, and of the necessary analysis

of the Gospels, they failed to make any serious impression on the scholars, especially as so many Freethinking critics, down to Reimarus and Voltaire, treated the historicity of Jesus as certain.<sup>1</sup> And when an anonymous German writer in 1799 published a treatise on Revelation and Mythology in which, according to Strauss, he posited the whole life of Jesus as pre-conceived in Jewish myth and speculation, he made no impression on an age busily and vainly occupied with the so-called "rationalizing" of myths and miracles by reducing them to natural events misunderstood.

Later, another—or the same?—anonymous German, also cited by Strauss, in a review article condemned every attempt to find a historical basis for the Gospel myths; but in both cases the anonymity sufficiently told of the general resentment against any such view. And when Strauss himself, the first to handle the problem with an approach to scientific thoroughness, not only adhered to the central assumption of historicity, but argued confidently that the mythical dissolution of so many of the details made no difference to faith, it was natural that interest in his undertaking should slacken. The fact that it had ruined his career would perhaps count for still more. Freedom of academic discussion in Germany has never meant any minimizing of pious malice; and Strauss all

<sup>1</sup> Wieland was something of a Freethinker; but when Napoleon in the famous interview mooted the problem raised by Dupuis and Volney, Wieland treated it as pure absurdity. He was then an old man.

his life long had to bear his cross for the offence of a new advance in historical science.

Dr. Albert Schweitzer, who for almost the first time, after Schmiedel, has brought the note of amenity into the argument for historicity as against the negative, remarks that the greatest Lives of Jesus are those which have been written with hate—to wit, those by Reimarus and Strauss. Reimarus, whom Dr. Schweitzer genially overrates, was indeed given to invective against mythological personages, from Moses downward; but “hate” is a strange term to apply to the calm and judicial procedure of Strauss. As well ascribe to hate the rise of Unitarianism. If hate is to be the term for Strauss’s mood, what epithet is left for that of his opponents, who, as Dr. Schweitzer relates, circled him with unsleeping malignity to the end, and sought to ostracize the clerical friend of his youth who delivered an address over his grave? It is only historic religion that can foster and sustain such hates as these. It is true that Bruno Bauer, who so suddenly advanced upon Strauss’s position, detecting new elements of mythic construction in the Gospels, and arriving ten years later at the definite doctrine of non-historicity, exhibited a play of storm and stress in the earlier part of his inquiry. He reviled at that stage, not the Jesus whose “life” he was investigating, but the theologians who had so confounded confusion. “These outbreaks of bitterness,” Dr. Schweitzer admits, “are to be explained by the feeling of repulsion which German apologetic theology inspired in every genuinely

honest and thoughtful man by the methods which it adopted in opposing Strauss.”<sup>1</sup> Add that the same methods were being employed towards Bauer, and the case is perhaps simplified.

With these cases before him, and with the record to write of a hundred and thirty years of admittedly abortive discussion, Dr. Schweitzer could not forgo an exordium in praise of the “German temperament” which had so wonderfully kept the discussion going. Such a record seems a surprising ground for national pride; but it may be granted him that the German temperament will never lack material for self-panegyric, which appears to be the breath of its nostrils. To those, however, for whom science is independent of nationality, the lesson has a somewhat different aspect. What has been lacking is scientific thoroughness. Bruno Bauer’s flaws of mood and method were such that his more radical penetration of the problem at certain points made no such impression as did the orderly and temperate procedure of Strauss. “One might suppose that between the work of Strauss and that of Bauer there lay not five but fifty years—the critical work of a whole generation.”<sup>2</sup> “Bauer’s ‘Criticism of the Gospel History’ is worth a good dozen Lives of Jesus, because his work, as we are only now coming to recognize, after half a century, is the ablest and most complete collection of the difficulties of the Life of Jesus which is anywhere to be found.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Eng. tr. of *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*), 1910, p. 153.      <sup>2</sup> Schweitzer, p. 151.      <sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 159.

But his mood and his method not only made him fail to establish his mythical theory; they meant miscarriage in the very conception of it—a mere substitution of a subjective notion for the method of inductive science. Bauer's final way of putting the theory merely discredits it. He decides that the whole myth was the creation of one evangelist, whereby he shows that he is no mythologist. He never reached the true myth basis. After all, "the German temperament" seems to fall short, at some rather essential points, of the faculty for solving great historical problems; one feels it somewhat acutely when Dr. Schweitzer comes to the undertaking himself.

The great merit of Schweitzer's book is its manly and genial tone; though, as this is freely bestowed on the most extreme heretics, he may make another impression when he speaks of the "inconceivable stupidity" of the average Life of Jesus in the treatment of the connection of events. What his book mainly demonstrates is the laborious futility of the age-long discussion maintained by the professional theologians of Germany. When he comes to the latest developments, which are but extensions of the common-sense analyses of Bruno Bauer, he is full of admiration for criticisms which, I can testify, have occurred spontaneously to unpretending Free-thinkers with no claim to special training. Some of the most important myth elements in the Gospels—for instance, the story of Barabbas—he does not even glance at, having apparently, like the other specialists, never realized that there is anything there to explain.

By Dr. Schweitzer's account, the great mass of the German specialists for a century past have been unable to see contradictions and incompatibilities in the Gospels which leap to the eyes; to himself, Wrede's statement of some of them appears to be a revelation. It would seem that the simple old "Secularist" method of exposing these had covered ground which for the specialists was wholly unexplored. Thus it comes about that the myth theory, addressed to men who had never realized the character of their own perpetually conned documents, fared as it might have done if addressed to the Council of Trent.

Of no myth-theories save those of Bruno Bauer and Pastor Kalthoff, which alike ignore the clues of mythology and anthropology, does Dr. Schweitzer seem to have any knowledge. He is capable of giving a senseless account of a book he has not seen, and, it may be, of one he has seen. Of CHRISTIANITY AND MYTHOLOGY he alleges that "according to that work the Christ-myth is merely a form of the Krishna-myth"—a proposition which tells only of absolute ignorance concerning the book. If, as I suspect, he has no better ground for his account of Hennell's INQUIRY as "nothing more than Venturini's 'Non-miraculous History of the Great Prophet of Nazareth' tricked out with a fantastic paraphernalia of learning,"<sup>1</sup> it speaks ill for the regular functioning of his critical conscience. But where he has to deal with concrete arguments

<sup>1</sup> Work cited, p. 161.



he is straightforward, alert, and readily appreciative; and his survey as a whole leads up to a complete dismissal of the whole work of the liberal school so-called. In his summing-up, the only critical choice left is between "complete scepticism" and "complete eschatology"—that is, between the avowal that there is no evidence for a historical Jesus, and the conviction that the historical Jesus was purely and simply a Jewish "hero and dreamer," whose entire doctrine was the advent of the kingdom of God, the ending of the old order, in which consummation he *secretly* believed he was to figure as the Messiah.

The bare statement of the proposition hardly reveals its significance. Dr. Schweitzer's "dreamer" is not M. Loisy's, who is conceived as having had something to teach to his disciples, and even to the multitude. Dr. Schweitzer's Jesus has, indeed, disciples for no assignable reason, but he is expressly declared to be no Teacher, even as Wrede's Teacher is expressly declared to be no Messiah. The joint result is to leave the ground tolerably clear for the scientific myth theory, of which Dr. Schweitzer has not come within sight, having omitted to inquire about it. As he sums up:—

Supposing that only a half—nay, only a third—of the critical arguments which are common to Wrede and the "Sketch of the Life of Jesus" [by Schweitzer] are sound, *then the modern historical view of the history is wholly ruined.* The reader of Wrede's book cannot help feeling that here no quarter is given; and any one who goes carefully through the present writer's "Sketch" must come

to see that between the modern historical and the eschatological life of Jesus no compromise is possible.<sup>1</sup>

Let us see, then, to what the eschatological theory amounts, considered as a residual historical explanation.

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 329.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE GROUND CLEARED FOR THE MYTH THEORY

THE issue as between Schweitzer and Wrede comes to this. Wrede sees that the Messiahship is a creation following upon the belief in the resurrection, and only uncritically deducible from the documents. For him, Jesus is a Teacher who was made into a Messiah by his followers after his death, the Gospels being manipulated to conceal the fact that he made no Messianic claims. Schweitzer sees that the Teaching Jesus is a documentary construction; and that, unless the Crucified One had *some* Messianic idea, the Gospel story as a whole crumbles to nothing. And he asks:—

But how did the appearance of the risen Jesus suddenly become for them [the disciples] a proof of His Messiahship and the basis of their eschatology? That Wrede fails to explain, and so makes this "event" an "historical" miracle which in reality is harder to believe than the supernatural event.<sup>1</sup>

So be it: Wrede's thesis is here, after all, part of the common content of the "liberal" ideal, which cannot stand. But how does his critic make good the converse of a would-be Messiah who was no

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 343.

Teacher, but yet had disciples, and was finally crucified for making a *secret* Messianic claim? The answer is too naïve to be guessed. Accepting, in defiance of every suggestion of common sense, the story of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Dr. Schweitzer decides that "the episode was Messianic for Jesus, but not Messianic for the people." With no authority save the documents which at this point he radically and recklessly alters, he decides that the multitude had hailed Jesus "as the Prophet, as Elias," whatever the texts may say; and Jesus, feeling he was the Messiah, "played with his Messianic self-consciousness" all the while. Why, then, was he put to death? Simply because Judas betrayed his secret to the priests! Dr. Schweitzer can see well enough the futility of the betrayal story as it stands, inasmuch as Judas is paid to do what was not required—identifying a well-known public figure. But rather than admit myth here he will invent a better story for himself, and we get this: Jesus had dropped Messianic hints to his disciples, and Judas sold the information. And all the while none of the other disciples knew this, though at the trial the priests went among the people and induced them "not to agree to the Procurator's proposal. How? By telling them why He was condemned; by revealing to them the Messianic secret. That makes him at once from a prophet worthy of honour into a deluded enthusiast and blasphemer."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 395.

“ In the name of the Prophet, figs ! ” Dr. Schweitzer has, he believes, saved the character of “ the mob of Jerusalem ” at last ; and by what a device ! By assuming that to claim to be the Messiah was to blaspheme, which it certainly was *not*;<sup>1</sup> and by assuming that the mob who had (on Schweitzer’s view) acclaimed an Elias would be struck dumb with horror on being told that Elias claimed to be the Messiah. The secret of this psychosis is in Dr. Schweitzer’s sole possession, as is the explanation of the total absence of his statement from all the literature produced by the generation which, on his assumption, knew all about the case. And this is what is left after a survey of the German exegesis “ from Reimarus to Wrede.”

It is to be feared that neither the scholars nor the laity will accept either of Dr. Schweitzer’s alternatives, and that the nature of his own prestidigitatory solution may tend somewhat to weaken the effect of his indictment of the kaleidoscopic process which has hitherto passed as a solution among the experts. Dr. Schweitzer seems to realize all absurdities save his own. None the less, he has done a critical service in arguing down all the rest, though even in his final verdict he exhibits symptoms of the “ sacred disease,” the theologian’s malady of self-contradiction :—

The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the Kingdom of God, who founded the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and died to give His work

<sup>1</sup> Compare Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, p. 313.

its final consecration, *never had any existence*. He is a figure designed by rationalism,<sup>1</sup> endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb.....

*He passes by our time and returns to his own.....*

The historical foundation of Christianity as built up by rationalistic, by liberal, and by modern theology no longer exists; but that does not mean that Christianity has lost its historical foundation.....

Jesus means something to our world because a mighty spiritual force streams forth from Him *and flows through our time also*<sup>2</sup>.....

“Loves me, loves me not,” as the little girls say in counting the flower petals. We seem entitled to suggest in the interests of simple science, as distinguished from Germanic *Kultur*, that temperament might perhaps usefully be left out of the debate; and that the question of what Jesus stands for may be left over till we have settled whether the film presented to us by Dr. Schweitzer can stand between us and a scientific criticism which assents to all of his verdict save the reservation in favour of his own thesis.

Meantime, let us not seem to suggest that the English handling of the historical problem during the nineteenth century has been any more scientific than the German. Hennell's treatment of it was but a simplification of Strauss's; and Thomas Scott's *Life of Jesus* was but an honest attempt to solidify Renan. In the early part of the nineteenth century little was achieved beyond the indispensable

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, the old German “rationalism” so-called, the theological method of compromise with reason.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* pp. 396-97.

weakening of the reign of superstition by critical propaganda. In early Victorian England, where Freethought had been left to unprofessional freelances, still liable to brutal prosecution, an anonymous attempt was made to carry the matter further in a curious book entitled "The Existence of Christ Disproved by Irresistible Evidence, in a Series of Letters by a German Jew." It bears no date, but seems to have been published between 1841 and 1849, appearing serially in thirty penny weekly numbers, printed in Birmingham, and published in London by Hetherington. As Hetherington, who died in 1849, was imprisoned in 1840 for the "blasphemous libel" of publishing Haslam's *LETTERS TO THE CLERGY*, but not earlier or later on any similar charge, he would seem to have been allowed to publish this without molestation.

About the author I have no information. He writes English fluently and idiomatically, and had read Strauss in the original. But though he presses against Hennell the argument from the case of Apollos, latterly developed by Professor W. B. Smith with such scholarly skill, the book as a whole has little persuasive power. The author is one of the violent and vehement men who alone, in the day of persecution, were likely to hazard such a thesis; and he does it with an amount of vociferation much in excess of his critical effort or his knowledge. It made, and could make, no impression whatever on the educated world; and I never met any Freethinker who had seen or heard of it.

It is in another spirit, and in the light of a far

greater accumulation of evidence than was available in the first half of the last century, that the mythical theory has been restated in our day. In particular it proceeds upon a treasury of anthropological lore which was lacking to Bruno Bauer, as it was to Ghillany, who was so much better fitted than Bauer to profit by such light. As knowledge of the past gradually arranges itself into science, and the malice of religious resistance recedes from point to point before the sapping process of culture, the temper of the whole debate undergoes a transmutation. After a generation in which a Lyell could only in privacy avow his views as to the antiquity of man, came that in which Tylor, without polemic, could establish an anthropological method that was to mean the reduction of all religious phenomena, on a new line, to the status of natural phenomena. And even the malice of the bigoted faithful, which will subsist while the faith endures, falls into its place as one of these, equally with the malice of the conventional theorists who meet the exposure of their untenable positions with aspersion in defect of argument.

But the fact that a recent German exegete has been found capable of facing the problem in a spirit of scientific candour and good temper, and with something of the old-time detachment which made Rosenkranz marvel at Carlyle's tone towards Diderot, may be a promise of a more general resort to civilized controversial methods. In any case, the fact that a trained New Testament critic, undertaking to establish the historicity of Jesus, has



affirmed the scientific failure of *all* the preceding attempts, and offered a historic residuum which few will think worth an hour's consideration, seems a sufficient demonstration that the mythical theory is the real battleground of the future.

In that connection it is interesting to note that Sir J. G. Frazer, who has so warmly contended that, as history cannot be explained "without the influence of great men," we must accept the historicity of Jesus,<sup>1</sup> latterly propounds a tentative theory of a historic original for Osiris, whom he supposes to have been perhaps evolved from the idealized personality of an ancient King Khent, buried at Abydos.<sup>2</sup> It is a mere suggestion, and it at once evokes the reminder that, on the theorist's own general principles, King Khent may be regarded as having been theocratically identified with the already existing God. However that may be, the hypothesis does nothing to save Sir James's irrelevant plea about the operation of "great men" and "extraordinary minds" in the founding of all religions, for he does not suggest that King Khent's career in any way resembled the myth of Osiris, or that he first taught the things Osiris is said to have taught. So that, in the case of Osiris as of Jesus, the required great men and extraordinary minds may still, in the terms of the claim, be inserted at any point rather than in the personage named or

<sup>1</sup> *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, 3rd ed. (vols. v and vi of 3rd ed. of *The Golden Bough*) i, 312, note. See the passage discussed in *Christianity and Mythology*, 2nd ed. p. 281.

<sup>2</sup> *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, as cited, ii, 19 sq., and pref. to vol. i.

suggested as Founder.<sup>1</sup> If we agree to call the compiler of the Sermon on the Mount and the parables of the Kingdom and the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan great men and extraordinary minds, Sir James's very simple argument is turned. And we should still be left asking who were the historic founders of the cults of Zeus and Brahma and Attis and Adonis, Dionysos and Herakles and Krishna and Aphrodite and Artemis.

On the other hand, as it happens, that very suggestion as to King Khent points afresh to the myth theory as the solution of the Gospel problem. Nothing emerges oftener in Sir James's great survey than the ancient connection between kingship and liability to sacrifice. It will not avail to close off that connection by claiming King Khent as a potentate of an age after that of sacrificed kings. The sacrificial past would still have to be taken into account in explaining the deification of King Khent. And it is just an analogous process that is suggested in our theory of the Jesus myth. A long series of slain Jesuses, ritually put to death at an annual sacrament "for the sins of many," is the ultimate anthropological ground given for the special cultus out of which grew the mythical biography of the Gospels.

And if Sir James remains satisfied with his charge that in putting such a theory we "flatter the vanity of the vulgar," we may be permitted to ask him which line of propaganda is likeliest to

<sup>1</sup> Compare Prof. W. B. Smith's criticism of the "great man" theory as put by Von Soden—*Ecce Deus*, p. 9 sq.

appeal to the multitude. Let him, in his turn, be on his guard against the vulgarity which seeks support in science from popular prejudice. As to his pronouncement that the theory which he so inexpensively attacks "will find no favour with the philosophic historian," one must just point out that it does not lie with him to draw up the conclusions of philosophic history outside of his own great department, or even, for that matter, *in* that department. His own historical generalizations, when they seek to pass from the strictly anthropological to the sociological status, will often really not bear the slightest critical analysis. They express at times an entire failure to realize the nature of a historical process, offering as they do mere chance speculations which patently conflict with the whole mass of the evidence he has himself collected. It is not an isolated opinion that by such abortive attempts at "philosophic history" he has tended to lessen the usefulness even of that collection, for which all students are his grateful debtors. In short, he would do well to turn from his ill-timed incursion into dogmatics to the relevant problem which he has forced upon so many of his readers—namely, What has become of his mythological maxim that the ritual precedes the myth?

While the professed mythologist rejects the application of the myth theory to the current religion in the name of "philosophic history," students ostensibly more concerned about religion reject the historicity theory in the name of their religious ideals, finding in the myth theory the vindication

of these. Thus Professor Drews has from the first connected the argument of his *DAS CHRISTUSMYTHE* with a claim to regenerate religion by freeing it from anthropomorphism; and I have seen other theistic pronouncements to the same effect; to say nothing of the declarations of scholarly Churchmen that for them the Jesus of the Gospels is a God or nothing, and that for them the historicity argument has no religious value. Such positions seem to me, equation for equation, very sufficiently to balance the bias of Sir James Frazer. For my own part, I am content to maintain the theory in the name of science, and it is by scientific tests that I invite the reader to try it.

## CONCLUSION

ENOUGH has now been said to make it clear to the open-minded reader that the myth-theory is no wanton challenge to belief in a clear and credible historical narrative. It is not the advocates of the myth-theory who have raised the issue. The trouble began with the attempts of the believers to solve their own difficulties. Before the rise of criticism so-called we find them hating and burning each other in their quarrels over the meaning of their central sacrament. As soon as criticism began to work on the problem of the miracles and the contradictions in the narratives of these, they set themselves to frame "Harmonies" of the Gospels which only brought into clearer relief their discordance. After the spread of scientific views had shaken the belief in miracles, they set themselves, still as believers, to frame explanatory Lives of Jesus in which miracles were dissolved into hallucinations or natural episodes misunderstood; and, as before, no two explanations coincided. A "consensus of scholars" has never existed.

It was after a whole generation of German scholars had laboured to extract a historical Jesus from the Gospel mosaic that Strauss produced his powerful and sustained argument to show that most of the separate episodes which they had arbitrarily striven

to reduce to history were but operations of the mythopœic faculty, proceeding upon the mass of Jewish prophecy and legend under the impulse of the Messianic idea. Strauss was no wanton caviller, but a great critic, forced to his work by the failure of a multitude of *Gelehrten vom Fach* to extract a credible result from what they admitted to be, as it stood, a history in large part incredible.

Strauss, in turn, believing at once in a residual historical Jesus and in the perfect sufficiency of a mere ideal personage as a standard for men's lives and a basis for their churches, left but a new enigma to his successors. He had stripped the nominal Founder of a mass of mythic accretions, but, attempting no new portrait, left him undeniably more shadowy than before. Later "liberal" criticism, tacitly accepting Strauss's negations, set itself anew to extract from the Gospels, by a process of more or less conscientious documentary analysis, the "real" Jesus whom the critics and he agreed to have existed. Renan undertook to do as much in his famous "romance"; and German critics, who so characterized his work, produced for their part only much duller romances, devoid of Renan's wistful artistic charm. And, as before, every "biographer" in turn demurred to the results of the others.

It is the result of the utter inadequacy of all these attempts to solve the historical problem, and of the ever-growing sense of the inadequacy of a mere legendary construction to form a code for human life and a basis for a cosmic philosophy, that independent inquirers in various countries have set

about finding out the real historical process of the rise of Christianity, dismissing the worn-out convention. Small-minded conservatives at once exclaim, and will doubtless go on saying, that those who thus explain away the "historical Jesus," are moved by their antipathy to Christianity, and to theism in general. The assertion is childishly false. One of the leading exponents of the myth-theory gives his theism—or pantheism—as the primary inspiration of his work. The present writer, as he has more than once explained, began by way of writing a sociological history of the rise of Christianity on the foundation of a historical Jesus with twelve disciples—this long after coming to a completely naturalistic view of religion, which excluded theism. From such a point of view there was no *à priori* objection whatever to a historical Jesus. At one time he sketched a hypothesis of several successive Jesuses. The intangibility of any historical Jesus was the conclusion slowly forced by a long attempt to clear the historical starting-point, supposed to be irreducible.

Since that discovery was reached, the discrediting of the conventional view has been carried to the verge of nihilism by men who still posit a historical Jesus, but critically eliminate nearly every accepted detail, leaving only a choice between two shadowy and elusive historical concepts, even less tenable than those they reject. In the works of Schweitzer and Wrede, there is literally more direct and detailed destruction of Gospel-myth than had been attempted by almost any advocate of the myth-theory who had

preceded them ; though, as we have seen, it is not difficult to carry the process further. In the name of the historicity claim, they have gone on eliminating one by one myth elements where the myth-theorists had been content to recognize myth in mass. He who would re-establish the historical Jesus has to combat, first and foremost, the latest scientific champions of the belief in the historicity.

Those English critics who, like Dr. Conybeare, have declaimed so loudly of a consensus of critics and of historical common-sense on the side of a "historical Christ," are simply fulminating from the standpoint of the German "liberalism" of thirty years ago. Nine-tenths of what they violently affirm has been definitely and destructively rejected by the latest German representatives of the critical class, in the very name of the defence of the historicity of Jesus. Orthodox Germans, on the other hand, have been pointing out that the "liberal" view is no longer "modern," the really modern criticism having shown that the Gospel-figure is a God-figure or nothing. Vainly they hope to reinforce orthodoxy by the operations of a strict critical method.<sup>1</sup> Our English "liberal-conservatives," all the while, are fighting with obsolete (German) weapons, and in total ignorance of the real course of the campaign in recent years.

In such circumstances, those of us who did our thinking for ourselves, without waiting for new German leads, have perhaps some right to appeal

<sup>1</sup> See the *brochure* of Prof. R. H. Grützmacher, *Ist das liberale Jesusbild modern?* 1907.



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anew to readers to do the same. . There is no race quarrel involved. But perhaps those students in the English-speaking countries who in the past have been wont to follow the German leads of the generation before their own, may now realize that they were unduly diffident, and proceed to make that use of their own faculties which Germans were always making from time to time.



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