

F. C. CONYBEARE



***THE HISTORICAL
CHRIST***

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The Historical Christ

**Or, An investigation of the views of Mr. J. M. Robertson, Dr. A. Drews,
and Prof. W. B. Smith**

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PREFACE

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This little volume was written in the spring of the year 1913, and is intended as a plea for moderation and good sense in dealing with the writings of early Christianity; just as my earlier volumes entitled *Myth, Magic, and Morals* and *A History of New Testament Criticism* were pleas for the free use, in regard to the origins of that religion, of those methods of historical research to which we have learned to subject all records of the past. It provides a middle way between traditionalism on the one hand and absurdity on the other, and as doing so will certainly be resented by the partisans of each form of excess.

The comparative method achieved its first great triumph in the field of Indo-European philology; its second in that of mythology and folk-lore. It is desirable to allow to it its full rights in the matter of Christian origins. But we must be doubly careful in this new and almost unworked region to use it with the same scrupulous care for evidence, with the same absence of prejudice and economy of hypothesis, to which it owes its conquests in other fields. The untrained explorers whom I here criticize discover on almost every page connections in their subject-matter where there are and can be none, and as regularly miss connections where they exist. Parallelisms and analogies of rite, conduct, and belief between religious systems and cults are often due to other causes than actual contact, inter-communication, and borrowing. They may be no more than sporadic and independent manifestations of a common humanity. It is not enough, therefore, for one agent or institution or belief merely to remind us of another. Before we assert literary or traditional connection between similar elements in story and myth, we must satisfy ourselves that such communication was possible. The tale of Sancho Panza and his visions of a happy isle, over which he shall hold sway when his romantic lord and master, Don Quixote, has overcome with his good sword the world and all its evil, reminds us of the naïf demand of the sons of Zebedee (Mark x, 37) to be allowed to sit on the right hand and the left of their Lord, so soon as he is glorified. With equal simplicity (Matthew xix, 28) Jesus promises that in the day of the regeneration of Israel, when the Son of Man takes his seat on his throne of glory, Peter and his companions shall also take their seats on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. The projected *mise en scène* is exactly that of a Persian great king with his magnates on their several "cushions" of state around him. There is, again, a close analogy psychologically between Dante's devout adoration of Beatrice in heaven and Paul's of the risen Jesus. These two parallels are closer than most that Mr. Robertson discovers between Christian story and Pagan myth, yet no one in his senses would ever suggest that Cervantes drew his

inspiration from the Gospels or Dante from the Pauline Epistles. In criticizing the Gospels it is all the more necessary to proceed cautiously, because the obscurantists are incessantly on the watch for solecisms—or “howlers,” as a schoolboy would call them; and only too anxious to point to them as of the essence of all free criticism of Christian literature and history.

Re-reading these pages after the lapse of many months since they were written, I have found little to alter, though Prof. A. C. Clark, who has been so good as to peruse them, has made a few suggestions which, where the sheets were not already printed, I have embodied. I append a list of *errata* calling for correction.

Fred. C. Conybeare.

March 1, 1914.

Chapter I

HISTORICAL METHOD

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Orthodox obscurantism the parent of Sciolism In *Myth, Magic, and Morals* (Chapter IX) I have remarked that the Church, by refusing to apply in the field of so-called sacred history the canons by which in other fields truth is discerned from falsehood, by beatifying credulous ignorance and anathematizing scholarship and common sense, has surrounded the figure of Jesus with such a nimbus of improbability that it seems not absurd to some critics of to-day to deny that he ever lived. The circumstance that both in England and in Germany the books of certain of these critics—in particular, Dr. Arthur Drews, Professor W. Benjamin Smith, and Mr. J. M. Robertson—are widely read, and welcomed by many as works of learning and authority, requires that I should criticize them rather more in detail than I deemed it necessary to do in that publication.

B. Croce on nature of History Benedetto Croce well remarks in his *Logica* (p. 195) that history in no way differs from the physical sciences, insofar as it cannot be constructed by pure reasoning, but rests upon sight or vision of the fact that has happened, the fact so perceived being the only source of history. In a methodical historical treatise the sources are usually divided into monuments and narratives; by the former being understood whatever is left to us as a trace of the accomplished fact—*e.g.*, a contract, a letter, or a triumphal arch; while narratives consist of such accounts of it as have been transmitted to us by those who were more or less

eye-witnesses thereof, or by those who have repeated the notices or traditions furnished by eye-witnesses.

Relative paucity of evangelic tradition Now it may be granted that we have not in the New Testament the same full and direct information about Jesus as we can derive from ancient Latin literature about Julius Cæsar or Cicero. We have no *monuments* of him, such as are the commentaries of the one or the letters and speeches of the other. It is barely credible that a single one of the New Testament writers, except perhaps St. Paul, ever set eyes on him or heard his voice. It is more than doubtful whether a single one of his utterances, as recorded in the Gospels, retains either its original form or the idiom in which it was clothed. A mass of teaching, a number of aphorisms and precepts, are attributed to him; but we know little of how they were transmitted to those who repeat them to us, and it is unlikely that we possess any one of them as it left his lips.

and presence of miracles in it, And that is not all. In the four Gospels all sorts of incredible stories are told about him, such as that he was born of a virgin mother, unassisted by a human father; that he walked on the surface of the water; that he could foresee the future; that he stilled a storm by upbraiding it; that he raised the dead; that he himself rose in the flesh from the dead and left his tomb empty; that his apostles beheld him so risen;

and that finally he disappeared behind a cloud up into the heavens.

explains and excuses the extreme negative school. It is natural, therefore—and there is much excuse for him—that an uneducated man or a child, bidden unceremoniously in the name of religion to accept these tales, should revolt, and hastily make up his mind that the figure of Jesus is through and through fictitious, and that he never lived at all. One thing only is certain—namely, that insofar as the orthodox blindly accept these tales—nay, maintain with St. Athanasius that the man Jesus was God incarnate, a pre-existent æon, Word of God, Creator of all things, masked in human flesh, but retaining, so far as he chose, all his exalted prerogatives and cosmic attributes in this disguise—they put themselves out of court, and deprive themselves of any faculty of reply to the extreme negative school of critics. The latter may be very absurd, and may betray an excess of credulity in the solutions they offer of the problem of Christian origins; but they can hardly go further along the path of absurdity and credulity than the adherents of the creeds. If their arguments are to be met, if any satisfactory proof is to be advanced of the historicity of Jesus, it must come, not from those who, as Mommsen remarked, “reason in chains,” but from free thinkers.

Yet Jesus is better attested than most ancients. Those, however, who have much acquaintance with antiquity must perceive at the outset that, if the

thesis that Jesus never existed is to be admitted, then quite a number of other celebrities, less well evidenced than he, must disappear from the page of history, and be ranged with Jesus in the realm of myth.

Age of the earliest Christian literature Many characteristically Christian documents, such as the Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Teaching of the Apostles, are admitted by Drews to have been written before A.D. 100.¹ Not only the canonical Gospels, he tells us,² were still current in the first half of the second century, but several never accepted by the Church—e.g., spurious gospels ascribed to Matthew, Thomas, Bartholomew, Peter, the Twelve Apostles. These have not reached us, though we have recovered a large fragment of the so-called Peter Gospel, and find that it at least presupposes canonical Mark. The phrase, “Still current in the first half of the second century,” indicates that, in Dr. Drews’s opinion, these derivative gospels were at least as old as year 100; in that case our canonical Gospels would fall well within the first. I will not press this point; but, anyhow, we note the admission that within about seventy years of the supposed date of Jesus’s death Christians were reading that mass of written tradition about him which we call the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They were also reading a mass of less accredited biographies—less trustworthy, no doubt, but, nevertheless, the work of authors who

entertained no doubt that Jesus had really lived, and who wished to embellish his story.

If Jesus never lived, neither did Solon, If, then, armed with such early records, we are yet so exacting of evidence as to deny that Jesus, their central figure, ever lived, what shall we say of other ancient worthies—of Solon, for example, the ancient Athenian legislator? For his life our chief sources, as Grote remarks (*History of Greece*, Pt. II, ch. 11), are Plutarch and Diogenes, writers who lived seven and eight hundred years after him. Moreover, the stories of Plutarch about him are, as Grote says, “contradictory as well as apocryphal.” It is true that Herodotus repeats to us the story of Solon’s travels, and of the conversations he held with Crœsus, King of Lydia; but these conversations are obviously mere romance. Herodotus, too, lived not seventy, but nearly one hundred and fifty years later than Solon, so that contemporary evidence of him we have none. Plutarch preserves, no doubt, various laws and metrical aphorisms which were in his day attributed to Solon, just as the Christians attributed an extensive body of teaching to Jesus. If we deny all authenticity to Jesus’s teaching, what of Solon’s traditional lore? Obviously Jesus has a far larger chance to have really existed than Solon.

or Epimenides, And the same is true of Epimenides of Crete, who was said to be the son of the nymph Balte; to have been mysteriously fed by the nymphs, since he was never seen to eat, and so forth. He was

known as the Purifier, and in that *rôle* healed the Athenians of plagues physical and spiritual. A poet and prophet he lived, according to some, for one hundred and fifty-four years; according to his own countrymen, for three hundred. If he lived to the latter age, then Plato, who is the first to mention him in his *Laws*, was his contemporary, not otherwise.

or Pythagoras, Pythagoras, again, can obviously never have lived at all, if we adopt the purist canons of Drews. For he was reputed, as Grote (Pt. II, ch. 37) reminds us, to have been inspired by the gods to reveal to men a new way of life, and found an order or brotherhood. He is barely mentioned by any writer before Plato, who flourished one hundred and fifty years later than he. In the matter of miracles, prophecy, pre-existence, mystic observances, and asceticism, Pythagoras equalled, if he did not excel, Jesus.

or Apollonius of Tyana Apollonius of Tyana is another example. We have practically no record of him till one hundred and twenty years after his death, when the Sophist Philostratus took in hand to write his life, by his own account, with the aid of memorials left by Damis, a disciple of the sage. Apollonius, like Jesus and Pythagoras, was an incarnation of an earlier being; he, too, worked miracles, and appeared after death to an incredulous follower, and ascended into heaven bodily. The stories of his miracles of healing, of his expulsions of demons, and raising of the dead, read exactly like

chapters out of the Gospels. He, like Jesus and Pythagoras, had a god Proteus for his father, and was born of a virgin. His birth was marked in the heavens by meteoric portents. His history bristles with tales closely akin to those which were soon told of Jesus; yet all sound scholars are agreed that his biographer did not imitate the Gospels, but wrote independently of them. If, then, Jesus never lived, much less can Apollonius have done so. Except for a passing reference in Lucian, Philostratus is our earliest authority for his reality; the life written of him by Moeragenes is lost, and we do not know when it was written. On the whole, the historicity of Jesus is much better attested and documented than that of Apollonius, whose story is equally full of miracles with Christ's.

Miracles do not wholly invalidate a document The above examples suffice. But, with the aid of a good dictionary of antiquity, hundreds of others could be adduced of individuals for whose reality we have not a tithe of the evidence which we have for that of Jesus; yet no one in his senses disputes their ever having lived. We take it for certain that hundreds—nay, thousands—of people who figure on the pages of ancient and medieval history were real, and that, roughly speaking, they performed the actions attributed to them—this although the earliest notices of them are only met with in Plutarch, or Suidas, or William of Tyre, or other writers who wrote one hundred, two hundred, perhaps six hundred years

after them. Nor are we deterred from believing that they really existed by the fact that, along with some things credible, other things wholly incredible are related of them. Throughout ancient history we must learn to pick and choose. The thesis, therefore, that Jesus never lived, but was from first to last a myth, presents itself at the outset as a paradox. Still, as it is seriously advanced, it must be seriously considered and that I now proceed to do.

Proof of the unhistoricity of Jesus, how attainable It can obviously not pass muster, unless its authors furnish us with a satisfactory explanation of every single notice, direct or indirect, simple or constructive, which ancient writers have transmitted to us. Each notice must be separately examined, and if an evidential document be composite, every part of it. Each statement in its *primâ facie* sense must be shown to be irreconcilable with what we know of the age and circumstances to which it pretends to relate. And in every case the new interpretation must be more cogent and more probable than the old one. Jesus, the real man, must be driven line by line, verse by verse, out of the whole of the New Testament, and after that out of other early sources which directly or by implication attest his historicity. There is no other way of proving so sweeping a negative as that of the three authors I have named.

How to approach ancient documents For every statement of fact in an ancient author is a problem, and has to be accounted for. If it accords with the

context, and the entire body of statement agrees with the best scheme we can form in our mind's eye of the epoch, we accept it, just as we would the statement of a witness standing before us in a law court. If, on the other hand, the statement does not agree with our scheme, we ask why the author made it. If he obviously believed it, then how did his error arise? If he should seem to have made it without himself believing it, then we ask, Why did he wish to deceive his reader? Sometimes the only solution we can give of the matter is, that our author himself never penned the statement, but that someone covertly inserted it in his text, so that it might appear to have contained it. In such cases we must explain why and in whose interest the text was interpolated. In all history, of course, we never get a direct observation, or intuition, or hearing of what took place, for the photographic camera and phonograph did not exist in antiquity. We must rest content with the convictions and feelings of authors, as they put them down in books. To one circumstance, however, amid so much dubiety, we shall attach supreme importance; and that is to an affirmation of the same fact by two or more independent witnesses. One man may well be in error, and report to us what never occurred; but it is in the last degree improbable that two or more Value of several independent witnesses in case of Jesusindependent witnesses will join forces in testifying to what never was. Let us, then, apply this

principle to the problem before us. Jesus, our authors affirm, was not a real man, but an astral myth. Now we can conceive of one ancient writer mistaking such a myth for a real man; but what if another and another witness, what if half a dozen or more come along, and, meeting us quite apart from one another and by different routes, often by pure accident, conspire in error. If we found ourselves in such case, would we not think we were bewitched, and take to our heels?

The oldest sources about Jesus Well, I do not intend to take to my heels. I mean to stand up to the chimeras of Messrs. Drews, Robertson, and Benjamin Smith. And the best courage is to take one by one the ancient sources which bear witness to the man Jesus, examine and compare them, and weigh their evidence. If they are independent, if they agree, not too much—that would excite a legitimate suspicion—but only more or less and in a general way, then, I believe, any rational inquirer would allow them weight, even if none were strictly contemporaries of his and eye-witnesses of his life. In the Gospel of Mark we have the earliest narrative document of the New Testament. This is evident from the circumstance that the three other evangelists used it in the composition of their Gospels. Drews, indeed, admits it to be one of the “safest” results of modern discussion of the life of Jesus that this Gospel is the oldest of the surviving four. He is aware, of course, that this conclusion has been questioned; but no one

will doubt it who has confronted The Gospel of Mark used in Matthew and Luke. Mark in parallel columns with Luke and Matthew, and noted how these other evangelists not only derive from it the order of the events of the life of Jesus, but copy it out verse after verse, each with occasional modifications of his own. Drews, however, while aware of this phenomenon, has yet not grasped the fact that it and nothing else has moved scholars to regard Mark as the most ancient of the three Synoptics; quite erroneously, as if he had never read any work of modern textual criticism, he imagines that they are led to their conclusion, firstly by the superior freshness and vividness of Mark, by a picturesqueness which argues him to have been an eye-witness; and, secondly, by the evidence of Papias, who, it is said, declared Mark to have been the interpreter of the Apostle Peter. In point of fact, the modern critical theologians, for whom Drews has so much contempt, attach no decisive weight in this connection either to the tradition preserved by Papias or to the graphic qualities of Mark's narratives. They rest their case mainly on the internal evidence of the texts before them.

Contents of Mark What, then, do we find in Mark's narrative?

Inasmuch as my readers can buy the book for a penny and study it for themselves, I may content myself with a very brief *résumé* of its contents.

It begins with an account of one John who preached round about Judæa, but especially on the Jordan, that the Jews must repent of their sins in order to their remission; in token whereof he directed them to take a ritual bath in the sacred waters of the Jordan, just as a modern Hindoo washes away his sins by means of a ritual bath in the River Jumna. An old document generally called Q. (Quelle), because Luke and Matthew used it in common to supplement Mark's rather meagre story, adds the reason why the Jews were to repent; and it was this, that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. Drews's account of MessianismDrews, in his first chapter of *The Christ Myth*, traces out the idea of this Kingdom of God, which he finds so prominent in the Jewish Apocalypics of the last century before and the first century after Christ, and attributes it to Persian and Mithraic influence. Mithras, he says, was to descend upon the earth, and in a last fierce struggle overwhelm Angromainyu or Ahriman and his hosts, and cast them down into the nether world. He would then raise the dead in bodily shape, and after a general judgment of the whole world, in which the wicked should be condemned to the punishments of hell and the good raised to heavenly glory, establish the "millennial kingdom." These ideas, he continues, penetrated Jewish thought, and brought about a complete transformation of the former belief in a messiah, a Hebrew term meaning the anointed—in Greek *Christos*. For, to begin with, the Christ was

merely the Jewish king who represented Jahwe before the people, and the people before Jahwe. He was “Son of Jahwe,” or “Son of God” *par excellence*; later on the name came to symbolize the ideal king to come—this when the Israelites lost their independence, and were humiliated by falling under a foreign yoke. This ideal longed-for king was to win Jahwe’s favour; and by his heroic deeds, transcending those of Moses and Joshua of old, to re-establish the glory of Israel, renovate the face of the earth, and even make Israel Lord over all nations. But so far the Messiah was only a human being, a new David or descendant of David, a theocratic king, a divinely favoured prince of peace, a just ruler over the people he liberated; and in this sense Cyrus, who delivered the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, the rescuer and overlord of Israel, had been acclaimed Messiah.

At last and gradually—still under Persian influence, according to Drews—this figure assumed divine attributes, yet without forfeiting human ones. Secret and supernatural as was his nature, so should the birth of the Messiah be; though a divine child, he was to be born in lowly state. Nay, the personality of the Messiah eventually mingled with that of Jahwe himself, whose son he was. Such, according to Drews, were the alternations of the Messiah between a human and a divine nature in Jewish apocalypses of the period B.C. 100 to A.D. 100. They obviously do not preclude the possibility of the Jews in that epoch

acclaiming a man as their Messiah—indeed, there is no reason why they should not have attached the dignity to several; and from sources which Drews does not dispute we learn that they actually did so.

John and Jesus began as messengers of the divine kingdom on earth Let us return to Mark's narrative. Among the Jews who came to John to confess and repent of their sins, and wash them away in the Jordan, was one named Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee; and he, as soon as John was imprisoned and murdered by Herod, caught up the lamp, if I may use a metaphor, which had fallen from the hands of the stricken saint, and hurried on with it to the same goal. We read that he went to Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe in the gospel or good tidings."

The rest of Mark is a narrative of what happened to Jesus on this self-appointed errand. We learn that he soon made many recruits, from among whom he chose a dozen as his particular missionaries or apostles. These, after no long time, he despatched on peculiar beats of their own. Jesus's anticipations of its speedy adventHe was certain that the kingdom was not to be long delayed, and on occasions assured his audience that it would come in their time. When he was sending out his missionary disciples, he even expressed to them his doubts as to whether it would not come even before they had had time to go round the cities of Israel. He confined the promises to

Jews It was not, however, this consideration, but the instinct of exclusiveness, which he shared with most of his race, that led him to warn them against carrying the good tidings of the impending salvation of Israel to Samaritans or Gentiles; the promises were not for schismatics and heathens, but only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Some of these details are derived not from Mark, but from the document out of which, as I remarked above, the first and second evangelists supplemented Mark.

Was rejected by his own kindred Like Luther, Loyola, Dunstan, St. Anthony, and many other famous saints and sinners, Jesus, on the threshold of his career, encountered Satan, and overthrew him. A characteristically oriental fast of forty days in the wilderness equipped him for this feat. Thenceforth he displayed, like Apollonius of Tyana and not a few contemporary rabbis, considerable familiarity with the demons of disease and madness. The sick flocked to him to be healed, and it was only in districts where people disbelieved in him and his message that his therapeutic energy met with a check. Among those who particularly flouted his pretensions were his mother and brethren, who on one occasion at least followed him in order to arrest him and put him under restraint as being beside himself or *exalté*. His Parables all turn on the coming Kingdom A good many parables are attributed to him in this Gospel, and yet more in Matthew and Luke, of which the burden usually is the near approach of the dissolution of this

world and of the last Judgment, which are to usher in the Kingdom of God on earth. We learn that the parable was his favourite mode of instruction, as it always has been and still is the chosen vehicle of Semitic moral teaching. No hint in the earliest sources of the miraculous birth of Jesus. Of the later legend of his supernatural birth, and of the visits before his birth of angels to Mary, his mother, and to Joseph, his putative father, of the portents subsequently related in connection with his birth at Bethlehem, there is not a word either in Mark or in the other early document out of which Matthew and Luke supplemented Mark. In these earliest documents Jesus is presented quite naturally as the son of Joseph and his wife Mary, and we learn quite incidentally the names of his brothers and sisters.

Late recognition of Jesus as himself the Messiah. Towards the middle of his career Jesus seems to have been recognized by Peter as the Son of God or Messiah. Whether he put himself forward for that *rôle* we cannot be sure; but so certain were his Apostles of the matter that two of them are represented as having asked him in the naivest way to grant them seats of honour on his left and right hand, when he should come in glory to judge the world. The Twelve expected to sit on thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel, and this idea meets us afresh in the Apocalypse, a document which in the form we have it belongs to the years 92-93.

His hopes shattered at approach of deathBut the simple faith of the Apostles in their teacher and leader was to receive a rude shock. They accompany him for the Passover to Jerusalem. An insignificant triumphal demonstration is organized for him as he enters the sacred city on an ass; he beards the priests in the temple, and scatters the money-changers who sat there to change strange coins for pilgrims. The priests, who, like many others of their kind, were much too comfortable to sigh for the end of the world, and regarded enthusiasts as nuisances, took offence, denounced him to Pilate as a rebel and a danger to the Roman government of Judæa. He is arrested, condemned to be crucified, and as he hangs on the cross in a last moment of disillusionment utters that most pathetic of cries: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He had expected to witness the descent of the kingdom on earth, but instead thereof he is himself handed over helpless into the hands of the Gentiles.

Such in outline is the story Mark has to tell. The rival and supplementary document of which I have spoken, and which admits of some reconstruction from the text of Matthew and Luke, consisted mainly of parables and precepts which Jesus was supposed to have delivered. It need not engage our attention here.

The mythical theory of JesusNow the three writers I have named—Messrs. Drews, Robertson, and W. B. Smith—enjoy the singular good fortune to be the first

to have discovered what the above narratives really mean, and of how they originated; and they are urgent that we should sell all we have, and purchase their pearl of wisdom. They assure us that in the Gospels we have not got any “tradition of a personality.” Jesus, the central figure, never existed at all, but was a purely mythical personage. The mythical character of the Gospels, so Drews assures us, has, in the hands of Mr. J. M. Robertson, led the way, and made a considerable advance in England; he regrets that so far official learning in Germany has not taken up a serious position regarding the mythic symbolical interpretation of the latter.³ Let us then ask, What is the gist of the new system of interpretation. It is as follows:—

Jesus = Joshua, a Sun-god, object of a secret cultJesus, or Joshua, was the name under which the expected Messiah was honoured in a certain Jewish secret society which had its headquarters in Jerusalem about the beginning of our era. In view of its secret character Drews warns us not to be too curious, nor to question either his information or that of Messrs. Smith and Robertson. This recalls to me an incident in my own experience. I was once, together with a little girl, being taken for a sail by an old sailor who had many yarns. One of the most circumstantial of them was about a ship which went down in mid ocean with all hands aboard; and it wound up with the remark: “And nobody never knew nothing about it.” Little girl: “Then how did you come to hear all

about it?" Like our brave old sailor, Dr. Drews warns us (p. 22) not to be too inquisitive. We must not "forget that we are dealing with a secret cult, the existence of which we can decide upon only by indirect means." His hypothesis, he tells us, "can only be rejected without more ado by such as seek the traces of the pre-Christian cult of Jesus in well-worn places, and will only allow that to be 'proved' which they have established by direct original documentary evidence before their eyes." In other words, we are to set aside our copious and almost (in Paul's case) contemporary evidence that Jesus was a real person in favour of a hypothesis which from the first and as such lacks all direct and documentary evidence, and is not amenable to any of the methods of proof recognized by sober historians. We must take Dr. Drews's word for it, and forego all evidence.

But let our authors continue with their new revelation. By Joshua, or Jesus, we are not to understand the personage concerning whose exploits the Book of Joshua was composed, but a Sun-god. The Gospels are a veiled account of the sufferings and exploits of this Sun-god. "Joshua is apparently [why this qualification?] an ancient Ephraimitic god of the Sun and Fruitfulness, who stood in close relation to the Feast of the Pasch and to the custom of circumcision."⁴

Emptiness of the Sun-god Joshua hypothesis Now no one nowadays accepts the Book of Joshua offhand as sound history. It is a compilation of older sources,

which have already been sifted a good deal, and will undergo yet more sifting in the future. The question before us does not concern its historicity, but is this: Does the Book of Joshua, whether history or not, support the hypothesis that Joshua was ever regarded as God of the Sun and of Fruitfulness? Was ever such a god known of or worshipped in the tribe of Ephraim or in Israel at large? In this old Hebrew epic or saga Joshua is a man of flesh and blood. How did these gentlemen get it into their heads that he was a Sun-god? For this statement there is not a shadow of evidence. They have invented it. As he took the Israelites dryshod over the Jordan, why have they not made a River-god of him? And as, according to Drews, he was so interested in fruitfulness and foreskins, why not suppose he was a Priapic god? They are much too modest. We should at least expect "the composite myth" to include this element, inasmuch as his mystic votaries at Jerusalem were far from seeing eye to eye with Paul in the matter of circumcision.

The Sun-myth stage of comparative mythology There was years ago a stage in the Comparative History of Religions when the Sun-myth hypothesis was invoked to explain almost everything. The shirt of Nessus, for example, in which Heracles perished, was a parable of the sun setting amidst a wrack of scattered clouds. The Sun-myth was the key which fitted every lock, and was employed unsparingly by pioneers of comparative mythology

like F. Max Müller and Sir George Cox. It was taken for granted that early man must have begun by deifying the great cosmic powers, by venerating Sun and Moon, the Heavens, the Mountains, the Sea, as holy and divine beings, because they, rather than humble and homelier objects, impress us moderns by their sublimity and overwhelming force. Man was supposed from the first to have felt his transitoriness, his frailty and weakness, and to have contrasted therewith the infinities of space and time, the majesty of the starry hosts of heaven, the majestic and uniform march of sun and moon, the mighty rumble of the thunder. Max Müller thought that religion began when the cowering savage was crushed by awe of nature and of her stupendous forces, by the infinite lapses of time, by the yawning abysses of space. As a matter of fact, savages do not entertain these sentiments of the dignity and majesty of nature. On the contrary, a primitive man thinks that he can impose his paltry will on the elements; that he knows how to unchain the wind, to oblige the rain to fall; that he can, like the ancient witches of Thessaly, control sun and moon and stars by all sorts of petty magical rites, incantations, and gestures, as Joshua made the sun stand still till his band of brigands had won the battle. It is to the imagination of us moderns alone that the grandeur of the universe appeals, and it was relatively late in the history of religion—so far as it can be reconstructed from the scanty data in our possession—that the