

## THE REPLY OF DREWS TO HIS CRITICS.<sup>1</sup>

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THE *Christ Myth* of Prof. Arthur Drews, first published in 1910,<sup>2</sup> has had one of the most remarkable careers in the history of controversial literature. Not even the famous much-debated *Babel und Bibel* of Friedrich Delitzsch ever roused such wide-spread interest and even anxiety, or heated the furnace of discussion to such sevenfold ardor. The title of Delitzsch's work was in itself one of the best of advertisements; the remarkable alliteration and consonance of the two names differing only in a single vowel, along with the sharp dissonance in suggestion, could not fail to strike the ear and catch the attention, and the matter of the work was strange enough to the layman, though in the main familiar to the biblical critic or even student. Drews's title was also very skilfully chosen.<sup>3</sup> Without the metrical or musical qualities of the other, it could nevertheless not fail to startle, to send a thrill through the frame, certainly a thrill of curiosity and very likely of horror.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Drews, *Die Christusmythe*. Zweiter Teil. Jena, Diederichs, 1910. English translation: *The Witnesses to the Historicity of Jesus*. Translated by Joseph McCabe. Chicago, Open Court Pub. Co., 1912.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Christusmythe*, Jena, Diederichs, 1910; English translation, Chicago, Open Court Publishing Co.

<sup>3</sup> And yet, I fear, less fitly and fortunately. For is there a Christ myth at all? Is the Christ in any proper sense a mythical character? To what class of myths are the Gospel stories to be referred? To myths of nature? or of culture? To myths ætiologic? or theogonic? Surely to none of these. Those narratives are not myths at all; they are allegories, more properly symbolisms, more or less highly dramatized, the perfectly conscious inventions of their authors, for a distinct didactic purpose, for thoroughly practical ends. How soon the original symbolic sense was forgotten and the stories accounted histories, must have varied from story to story and from mind to mind. The phrase "Christ myth" excites a certain needless and unjustified reaction against the new view (at least as held by the present writer), as if Christ-Jesus were regarded as on a level with Apollo, Jupiter, Indra, and the "legion" of Greek-Roman-Hindu deities. Such indeed is the misrepresentation in the book just issued by Case on *The Historicity of Jesus*, whereas He stands not at all in line with any such divinities but exactly in line with the *One God* of Plato and the Yahveh-Elohim of the Old Testament.

Moreover the material of the book, though avowedly not the result of original research but the organization and systematization of results attained by a number of independent investigators, was not only unfamiliar even to the great majority of specialists, but was in the last degree unacceptable, not only to the orthodox-conservative but still more to the heterodox-liberal religious consciousness, not only of Germany but of all Europe and America—in a word, of the Christian world. For Drews boldly maintained that no such historical person as Jesus had ever lived. Here was the center and core of his contention, in this terrible *negation*—the positive aspect seemed far less disquieting. Precisely what Jesus *was*, appeared to the reader rather a matter of indifference. To say that he was God seemed not so very novel, men had been saying that for millenniums; but that he was *not* man, was not historic, had never been begotten and born and nursed and reared and taught and clothed and sent to bed and on errands to the neighbors, had never worked with plane and saw and lathe as carpenter, nor ever eaten and drunk, nor hungered and thirsted, nor fallen asleep nor waked up, nor led the ordinary life of a Galilean peasant for 30 or 50 years,—such a notion seemed in the last degree sacrilegious and roused the fierce resentment of all the devoted worshippers of the pure-human Jesus, throughout the length and breadth of Germany. To deny outright that Jesus was divine, to labor through a thousand volumes to show that the accounts of his miracles were gross exaggerations or ludicrous misunderstandings on the part of his biographers, that his healings were at best *à la* Hahnemann, being wrought on the psychopathic by a psychopath, that his resurrection and ascension were merely visions of disordered imaginations, the dreams of hallucinated women, that the propagation of his Gospel and his worship was the perpetuation and consecration of a tissue of puerile fables, legends, and misrepresentations—all this seemed to be for the greater glory of Jesus, of Christ, and of God. To believe it, seemed to be indispensably necessary to the health and happiness, the peace, the comfort, and the salvation of man, while to teach and prove it appeared to be in every way a noble and beneficent function of the profoundest erudition and the most rigorous science. As over against this inspiring doctrine of a deified carpenter, this uplifting enthronement, in the center of our faith and worship, of an avowedly ignorant and narrow-minded Jewish peasant, the denial of any such pure-humanity, the refusal to accept any such mere man as the fount and origin of all our religious life, as the guiding genius of everlasting history, seemed particularly pert and

impious, while the counter affirmation that Jesus was from the start a deity, and worshiped as such, as God himself under the aspect of Guardian and Saviour of men, seemed to make no manner of reparation but to be foolishly pagan and heathenish, unscientific, irreligious, blasphemous, "unmethodic," and even "dilettantish" in the extreme.

It was the author of *Der vorchristliche Jesus* who had laid especial emphasis on this affirmation of the aboriginal divinity of the Jesus and had scarcely noted even in passing the necessary implication of non-humanity in this deity. Evidently he had meant to deal very tenderly with the universal Christian consciousness, to set a gentle hand to a festering wound, to proceed as far as possible with construction before giving any hint of destruction; he seemed indeed intent on building up a new temple of Jesus the God before tearing down the old altar of Jesus the Man. Such consideration was evidently very ill-advised; for to introduce once more the worship of God seemed to reconcile only a few to the loss of the worship of a Man. So pleased had the critical mind grown to regard the Gospels as a system of sensual lies that it seemed profanity to regard them as a body of spiritual truths! Hence the olive-branch presented by the author was trampled in the dust, his peace-offering was contemptuously rejected, and his theological compatriots, with the large-minded "impartiality," the "wholly unprejudiced spirit" and the "total absence of bias" that have characterized the ecclesiastic in every age and clime, regarding the books as the impertinent intrusion of a layman, "passed by on the other side."

Drews was far wiser, and by aiming his lance at the most sensitive point of the critical consciousness and by striking it fair and square, he provoked an amazing reaction. All Germany was thrown into a ferment. From peasant's hut to emperor's yacht, from Biergarten to Cathedral, from ponderous tome to fluttering feuilleton—all things became at once animated with his great denial. It was like the broad wing of the wind suddenly smiting the smooth sea-tunic and ruffling it instantly into foam. Every month called for a new edition of his famous work, which flew all over Europe and beyond the seas; it was felt that for the first time in history the nerve of the great question concerning the origin and therewith the nature of our Christian civilization had been touched. At last the all-important query had been forced forward to the very center of the stage, there to remain till finally settled in some sense, despite all efforts of organized interests and all devices of interested learning to cry it down, to frighten it back, to conjure it away, or even to

shut tight the eyes and shout lustily that it is not there—because forsooth they will not see it.

The tempest of angry denunciation has in some measure subsided, but the calm and earnest consideration of the matter has begun and proceeds apace. The hour of the hasty, passionate, and inaccurate brochure has passed; the day of the weighty and deliberate volume has come. The confused rattle of skirmishing muskets is dying away, the solemn roar of siege guns rises on the air.

The second volume of Drews's work, *Die Christusmythe, zweiter Teil*, may be said to mark in a manner this transition. It deals primarily with "The Testimonies to the Historicity of Jesus," but is concerned in large measure with the countless assaults upon the first volume, and by repelling these in detail it clears the field for the really decisive battle. Whatever one may think of the main point at issue, it seems impossible not to admire the patience, the thoroughness, the skill, the ingenuity with which Drews has met his assailants at such a multitude of points and undoubtedly driven them back at the majority. The mere act of reading the huge mass of matter discussed would seem to have called for the eyes of Argus, and the task of untangling the multifold skein of German apology and tracing out the knotted and twisted threads of argumentation in a hundred volumes would seem to involve time and toil beyond the measure of one man and one year. But Drews has not shrunk from the Herculean labor; little seems to have escaped him, and his book of rebuttals is a more significant achievement than his first volume, even though it should not win half so much popularity and applause.<sup>4</sup>

The question may arise in the reader's mind, Was it then really worth while to answer a host of cavilers at such length, with such painstaking honesty and minuteness? To sift whole bushels of words for a few occasional grains of idea? The present writer confesses he could never have had the patience and conscientiousness required for such an enterprise. Yet the thing was well worth doing and worth doing well. Any neglect even of an insignificant objection would have been instantly construed into a confession of defeat, so that it was necessary to give his opponents far more attention than they logically deserved.

But Drews has not merely answered his critics point by point; he has exhibited very strikingly the contradictions into which some have hastily rushed, and what is far more, the spirit and method

<sup>4</sup> Such too is the judgment of the hostile Windisch, as it appears in the April number of the *Theologische Rundschau*.

that all have brought to the work, and has shown how unscientific these are, and how they vitiate beforehand all the processes and the results even of critics that have otherwise deserved well of the Clio of criticism. Of course, the enemy will reply to Drews's answer by silence, "a weapon surer set and better than the bayonet," which even the inexpert can use with perfect skill and ease, quite as effectively also as the most consummate master. How well too it becomes its wielder, how he is transfigured by it (even as a matador by his muleta) into a superior being gently smiling in his conscious might! The one difficulty that prejudices the efficiency of this admirable engine and seriously limits its use by the discreet, lies in the fact that it is so easily confounded with the exact opposite. Men have been known to keep silence solely because they had naught to say, as he who had not a wedding garment on. So too the logician panoplied in the invincible mail of silence looks sometimes for all the world like the knight despoiled of armor and totally impotent. For this reason such a defense should be used only with the greatest discretion, and its too persistent employment is open to the most unfavorable construction.

It has already been said that this Second Part is superior to the First. To one notable aspect of this superiority it may be well to call special attention. Not only is the logical grapple much closer in this volume, but the positions assumed are on the whole much more tenable. In the elder work there was a more extensive mustering of forces from the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, but these were not always well-equipped with modern artillery. Hence the enemy wisely concentrated fire on some comparatively helpless detachments and raised a great shout of victory at their discomfiture, while cautiously holding aloof from any encounter with the real soldiery. The mythological portions of Drews's argument, in which he drew on the ideas of Robertson, Dupuis, Niemojewski, Jensen and others, "were mercilessly handled" by the all-and-better-knowing liberal, who like "Proud Cumberland prances insulting the slain." In the new volume these questionable auxiliaries are mostly retired to the rear, and the battle is delivered with a well-appointed army. True, the notions of Fuhrmann receive recognition but fortunately not prominence. It may well be that astrologic ideas have at more than one point colored or shaped the imagery of the New as well as of the Old Testament, but that these documents are in large measure astrologic has not yet been proved and is antecedently too improbable to be made the basis of argument.

At this point it seems proper to enter a protest against the

prevailing method of attack upon the new criticism, beautifully exemplified in Case's recent work, by falling afoul of isolated statements to the neglect of the main body of argument. This is mere guerilla warfare, annoying at most, but without any avail. What shall it profit to kill a whole company of pickets, if the march of the army is not disturbed? No doubt "Drews and his authorities" may have fallen into occasional error, but what does it signify, if (as Cheyne continues) they "are right in the main"? Surely it is well known that the "Critique of Pure Reason" literally swarms with mistakes and inconsistencies; nevertheless it remains the chief leaven of philosophy in the 19th and even now in the 20th century. The new criticism may go astray at a hundred points, but the important question is, where is it right? Into what better and hitherto unbroken path has it guided critical thought? What novel points of view has it attained? What fresh insights has it disclosed? What new orientation has it made necessary? It is the proper task even of the unsympathetic reviewer to answer these and similar questions, if he would really enlighten his reader, and not to confine himself to strictures in detail, however just they may be.

From such mere negation no great good can come. It is the positive elements of the new criticism that most interest the intelligent reader. To set these forth cannot indeed fall within the scope of this notice; the reader may be referred to the works of Drews and Bolland, also to *Ecce Deus* now issuing enlarged and Englished from the press of Watts and Company, London. But that such elements actually do exist, that the foregoing questions really admit of positive answers, may be seen clearly in or between the lines of more than one high-placed reviewer and has been openly avowed in many private communications from distinguished authorities. In the utter absence of such positive and collective judgment, merely scattering cavils and denials may remind one of the Arab lances hurled violently in passing at the Pyramids of Egypt.