

A REPLY TO MRS. EVANS' THE CHRIST MYTH.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE CONSERVATIVE:

Noticing an article in a recent issue of THE CONSERVATIVE on Christ and the Gospels by Elizabeth E. Evans, I would like to make a bill of exceptions.

The article in question aims to disprove the historic reality of such a person as Jesus Christ.

Her first disproof is because theologians differ as to the nature of Christ, that "the prevalence of so many and so contradictory conceptions of the same character proves the lack of authentic knowledge in the premises." A most extraordinary statement when we consider that all these "contradictory conceptions" are confessedly derived from the same source, viz. the Holy Scriptures. The nature of Christ is one thing, a matter of theology; his reality quite another, a matter of history.

As well say, for example, that because historians, studying the same sources, disagree as to the character of Napoleon, therefore Napoleon is a myth.

Again, "Recent discoveries have tended to negative the authority of Jesus as a spiritual leader, through the unavoidable suspicion fast growing into a certainty, that no such being ever existed."

When anyone is engaged in overturning the historical beliefs of nineteen centuries, they should be more explicit. "Recent discoveries" sounds well, but may mean anything or nothing. It lacks definition; but here the authoress qualifies:

"This argument is founded upon the undeniable fact that there is no mention of Jesus in contemporary literature, either Jewish or Pagan. Authentic history is absolutely silent as to such a personality."

Let me see, Jesus died A. D. 28; Rome was burned by Nero A. D. 65; Tacitus wrote about A. D. 85; Pliny wrote about A. D. 95.

Contemporary Writings.

Now will Mrs. Evans, first of all, suggest what particular Roman or other pagan writers wrote between the years 28 and 95, whose subject matter was such as would be at all called upon to touch upon the existence of Jesus Christ.

Virgil, Ovid, Horace and Livy had passed away. From the crucifixion to Tacitus we have the following literary remains from which to find a mention of Christ:

The Satires of Persius.

The fragments of a Prose Novel by Petronius.

The Pharsalia of Lucan.

The Philosophy of Seneca.

The works of certain Rhetoricians and Grammarians.

It would scarcely be fair to expect any mention of a despised sect or its founder, starting in the obscure Province of

Judea and quietly leavening Roman society from the bottom, amongst such a collection of authors.

In the next generation we find several great writers, two of whom living less than fifty years after the crucifixion, make a distinct mention of Christ and Christianity.

Tacitus, the greatest Latin historian, mentions Christ (Annals Bk. XV.) and Christianity. Referring to the burning of Rome, by Nero, twenty-seven years after the crucifixion, Tacitus says: "He seized an immense multitude of men whom the common people called Christians. They derived their name and origin from Christ, who in the reign of Tiberius had suffered death by the sentence of procurator, Pontius Pilate." In twenty-seven years after the death of Christ, under Pontius Pilate, Christianity could be spoken of by Tacitus as an "immense multitude." Pliny, the younger, Proconsul of Bithynia, writing, in 95 A. D., to the Emperor Trajan regarding the arrest of certain persons for professing Christianity, says: "That a great number of persons of every age, rank and sex were compromised and others would be; that not only the cities but the towns and villages were overrun with that contagious superstition that in fine the deserted temples and the sacred ceremonies, which had for a long time been interrupted, began to revive in consequence of the measures taken against the Christians."

Evidently Christianity, founded by Christ, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, had gained some headway in the first century if it could be spoken of as comprising an enormous multitude in Rome and of depopulating the heathen temples in Bithynia."

Authentic History.

"Authentic history is absolutely silent as to such a personality."

Mrs. Evans is kind enough to allow that a record may be found in the Gospel; the Epistles of St. Paul; in the statements of the Christian Fathers; in certain legends of the enemies of Christianity (the Jews); and in a very few Pagan writers. Now what does our fair authoress expect. Here, according to the confession of Tacitus and Pliny, to be proved a Christian was to be put to death; to be found with Christian documents on your person was to court torture; strange that a history of Christ was not easily obtainable by heathen historians at a time when there were no heathen historians.

"But not one of these sources is contemporary with the career of Jesus. * * * The Gospels were not composed until the latter part of the second century. * * * Christians are taught that the four Gospels were written by the four disciples, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, whereas those compositions were not known to the early Christians until nearly two hundred

years after the supposed events which they record."

Mrs. Evans speaks as one having authority as to what the Christians did not know during the first two centuries. As the first two centuries, according to Mrs. Evans, are barren of authentic records of any description regarding Christ and Christianity, how does she know what the early Christians did not know?

Traditional History.

She acknowledges that there was a tradition that "Matthew wrote a book entitled, 'Oracles of our Lord,' but if such a work ever existed it was not the Gospel called by his name." Of course not as Mrs. Evans has just told us authoritatively that the aforesaid Gospel was not written until 228 A. D. Now Mrs. Evans does not mention that this tradition was the record of a Christian father named Papias, who lived (A. D. 70-155) in Hierapolis, a city of Phrygia, and he wrote as follows: "Mark having become the interpreter of Peter wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings and deeds of Christ. * * * Matthew put together the oracles of the Lord in the Hebrew language and each one interpreted them as best he could." Of course the Oracles of the Lord were not the Gospels of St. Matthew nor the writings of St. Mark; those of St. Mark merely similar writings of a similar name.

And Irenaeus who lived (A. D. 120-202) in Lyons, a city of Gaul, after quoting copiously from the four gospels in order says: "So firm is the ground upon which the Gospels rest that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them; each one of them endeavors to establish his own peculiar doctrine." As for example Marcian, whom Mrs. Evans herself quotes, "accepted the Gospel of St. Luke," which was not written, mind you, until after 200 A. D., although Marcian lived before 140 A. D. Strange that he should have based his heresy on a book that was not to be written for over sixty years.

It is very strange to one accustomed to read Irenaeus, Ignatius and Justin Martyn, the Fathers referred to, to know that "they do not allude to the Gospels but do quote from works in language similar and in substance sometimes agreeing with, sometimes differing from the Canonical Gospels."

Why does Mrs. Evans switch from her original purpose to disprove the historic reality of Jesus Christ. What matter whether these fathers quote similar or the same works as long as they testify unanimously to the main fact at issue—the reality of Christ as a person. Of course Papias only referred to similar works when he speaks of Matthew and Mark; and Irenaeus is only prophesying when he refers to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as hav-