

CHRISTIAN ARCHAEOLOGY.

(Continued.)

III. PUBLIC WORSHIP.

The pentecostal firstfruits of New Testament Christianity were not gathered in the streets of Jerusalem by a band of Salvationists, but in a meeting of the disciples who *were all with one accord in one place,*¹⁾ sitting in a house,²⁾ probably one of the thirty halls connected with the temple. We know that the 120 who formed the nucleus of this first Christian congregation, men and women, had been accustomed to meet for prayer and supplication.³⁾ At this pentecostal meeting, the *wonderful works of God*⁴⁾ were proclaimed, and Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and preached the gospel of Christ crucified and glorified.⁵⁾ There were those who *gladly received his word,*⁶⁾ which could not have been known to the apostles but by a profession of faith, which the new converts made before they *were baptized.*⁷⁾

Here, then, we have the various acts performed in the first meeting of the first congregation of primitive Christianity: the preaching of the word, the administration of a sacrament, confession of faith and prayer. Nor was this

1) Acts 2, 1.

2) Acts 2, 2.

3) Acts 1, 14.

4) Acts 2, 11.

5) Acts 2, 14 ff.

6) Acts 2, 41.

7) Acts 2, 41.

HIGHER CRITICISM IN THE PULPIT.

The story goes of a rationalistic theologian at one of the German universities a hundred years ago, that a student who had fed on his thistles through several semesters and was about to go into the ministry complained to him of his misgivings as to the wisdom of preaching to the congregation what he had heard in the lecture room. "You blooming idiot," said the Professor, "do you think I told you these things that you should go and preach them to the people? Give them what the Catechism says." Rationalism is certainly bad enough in the theological lecture room, as small-pox in a hospital. But when a hospital nurse who has taken the disease goes out in a state of efflorescence to serve as a cook for healthy and unsuspecting people, it is time that the police should interfere and put a stop to her nefarious business.

Higher criticism is a disease which is a thousand times worse than smallpox, and those who are infected with it are in a bad plight themselves and a menace to the inmates of the wards in which they wear their garb and badge of "scientific theologians." We have all heard of Dr. Briggs, and we pity him and the students of Union Seminary, many of whom are not vaccinated. But when he comes out of that hospital and goes into the pulpits of the "Church of the Holy Communion, New York," "Trinity Church, Pittsburg," "St. Bartholomew's, New York," "the Church of the Messiah, Brooklyn," and other churches, where men, women, and children, who come for edification, not to be inoculated with "scientific theology" and "higher criticism," are exposed to his contagion, and when we think that other preachers covered with the same scab will follow his example, we pity the people among whom the epidemic is sure to spread. To make matters worse, the sermons which Dr. Briggs preached in those churches have been published in a volume entitled, *The Incarnation of the Lord, a series*

of sermons tracing the unfolding of the doctrine of the incarnation in the New Testament. By this vehicle the virus of modern theological unbelief will be carried into the circulation of thousands who would not have thought of exposing themselves to the dangers of Union Seminary, the more so, as the Doctor makes the book an advertising medium for his earlier writings, his "*Messianic Prophecy*," "*the Messiah of the Gospels*," "*the Messiah of the Apostles*," the "*General Introduction to the Study of the Holy Scriptures*," which are recommended in the "Preface" and by frequent references in the footnotes of the "Sermons."

In these "Sermons" the Higher Criticism manifests itself to the discerning eye as the base and shameless swindle which it is at all times and everywhere. These "Sermons" and the book in which they are here embodied presuppose hearers and readers who are ready to repose simple and childlike faith in everything except the Holy Scriptures. To base Christian faith upon such arguments as those advanced by this preacher is simply impossible, and whoever professes to believe the doctrine of the Incarnation, the fundamental fact of the Christian religion, on the strength of the methods pursued in these "Sermons," is either credulous enough to believe almost anything or dishonest enough to profess almost anything. The only sufficient basis on which Christian faith may rest, the assurance that the writings of the Old and the New Testaments are the word of God, is here discarded, and in its stead human conjectures, fancies and falsehoods are made the foundations of theories which are dished out as historic and religious truths.

In the first Sermon the preacher quotes a number of sayings of Jesus in which the term *Son of Man* is used. "A very large proportion of these," we are told, "come from the Logia of St. Matthew, that large collection of the Wisdom of Jesus that St. Matthew issued in the Hebrew language, and in the measures of Hebrew Wisdom, before

any of our present Gospels were composed.”¹⁾ The preacher then proceeds to quote a number of dicta of Christ, which he introduces with the statement: “These words of Jesus are from the Logia.” The quotations are from the synoptic Gospels. In a footnote the author says: “In this case and in those that follow an effort has been made to find the original words of Jesus at the basis of the several texts.”²⁾ And in another note: “The original form of these logia differs slightly from the several versions given in the Gospels. The laws that govern the forms of Hebrew Wisdom enable us to determine it.”³⁾ This is Higher Criticism. The sources from which Dr. Briggs has these sayings of Jesus are the synoptic Gospels, such passages as Matt. 13, 41. Mark 8, 38. Luke 9, 26; cf. Matt. 10, 33. 12, 9.—Matt. 24, 37—39. Luke 17, 26—30; cf. Matt. 24, 14.—Matt. 10, 23. Luke 11, 30. But he quotes them expressly as from “the Logia.” Of course, he never saw this “collection of the Wisdom of Jesus,” issued by St. Matthew “in the Hebrew language, and in the measures of Hebrew Wisdom.” Nor has anybody else ever seen it, or said that he had seen it. These *Logia*, purported to have been compiled by St. Matthew “before any of our present Gospels were composed,” are simply a critical nightmare brought on by misinterpreted statements of or concerning Papias found in Eusebius, a fiction unknown to all Christian antiquity and hooted down by some of the Higher Critics themselves. Yet Dr. Briggs quotes from “the Logia,” which no man has ever seen or professed to have seen, and what he has not found in the Logia, but simply in the Gospels. But then, every intelligent child of twelve years and average attainments can quote from the Gospels, while it takes a “D. D., D. Litt.” to quote from the *Logia*, especially when “the original form of these logia,” which no one has ever seen, “differs slightly from the several versions given in the Gospels.” What manner of “Science” and of foun-

 1) P. 8.

2) P. 9.

3) P. 10.

dation for Christian faith can this be? Are we to base our faith on the Gospels or on something else? St. John says of the things written in his book, *These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ.*¹⁾

But what does our homiletical Higher Critic say concerning this foundation of our faith, the Gospel of St. John?

"It is doubtless true that in this Gospel we are not so near to the exact words and the exact conceptions of Jesus as in the sayings of the Logia of St. Matthew and in the Synoptic Gospels. The author, I think, translated an original Hebrew Gospel of St. John, and enlarges it with explanatory words and sentences setting forth the thinking about Jesus' life and teachings current toward the close of the century among the pupils of St. John."²⁾

This is an execrable piece of jugglery. Starting in with the assertion, "It is doubtless true," the preacher would make the woman in the pew believe what is doubtless untrue, and disbelieve what is doubtless true. When Lessing, whose talent for criticism stood head and shoulders above Dr. Briggs, struck his critical blows against the four Gospels, he expressly gave his ideas as by way of "Hypothesis," and looked toward "men of cool critical erudition" as his judges. This preacher in the pulpit palms off his less than hypothetical falsehoods as "doubtless true," and that upon hearers many or most of whom are utterly destitute of critical training and equipment. But Dr. Briggs has still more to say to the woman in the pew concerning the Gospel of St. John:—

"The Gospel has an introduction in verses 1—18 of the first chapter. This seems to be a Christian hymn of the incarnation. This hymn was probably sung in the churches of Asia towards the close of the century, for it has measured lines and strophical organization."³⁾ . . . "But the prologue of St. John's Gospel goes further, and

1) John 20, 31.

2) Pp. 52 f.

3) Pp. 191 sq.

that in the line of thought of the Jewish philosopher Philo."') . . . "And so the author of the Christian hymn to the Logos introduces into the New Testament, and into Christian theology, this speculative, philosophic way of thinking about the relation of the Son of God to the Father.

"It is no disparagement to Christianity, as some people think, that it uses the best thoughts that have come to men outside the sphere of divine revelation. It is rather an evidence of a sublime confidence in truth and fact. The best Christian scholars from St. John's time onward have not hesitated to recognize and use, in constructing Christian theology and Christian institutions, all that is good and true and noble in the religions and philosophies formed outside the ranges of divine revelation. They did this, because they recognized that the divine Word is the light of the world, and that he shines in some measure in all ages and in all lands, struggling with the darkness everywhere, and imparting gleams of light even in the darkest minds. We ought, therefore, to expect to find the light of truth in such a profound thinker as the Jewish philosopher Philo, and in the Greek philosopher Socrates.

"This first introduction of philosophy into Christian theology by the author of this early Christian hymn was only the first wave of a flood of thought which gave Christian theology its philosophical form for all time. The Greek mind had been trained by the divine Word to make this contribution to Christian theology."')²⁾

It is to be feared that the woman in the pew who goes to hear Dr. Briggs in the pulpit is no less credulous than the preacher, who, in the beginning of his sermon, speaks of what "seems to be" a Christian hymn which was "probably" sung in Asia, and before he has finished one-fourth of his discourse has thrown all reserve and caution to the winds and speaks of "the author of the Christian hymn to

1) P. 193.

2) Pp. 194 f.

the Logos" and "the author of this early Christian hymn," as later on of "the poet," of "our poem," with all the familiarity of an old acquaintance, although that nameless "poet" has no more existence in history than the man in the moon. A person who so easily persuades himself from conjecture to history is pretty sure to persuade others, if not by his argument—which he does not as much as attempt—yet by the example of credulity which he sets. That this fictitious poet was not an original thinker, but borrowed, bought or inherited his contribution to Christian theology from "the Jewish philosopher Philo," is but another fiction of Dr. Briggs or those from whom he borrowed or bought it, though the woman in the pew will probably give the preacher all the credit for what she will consider his discovery. But there is one lonesome truth for which we too would give the Doctor credit. It is the acknowledgment that "some people" think it a disparagement to Christianity to attribute a truth of divine revelation to the Jewish philosopher Philo as its originator. "Some people" know what Christianity is, and some people, among them Dr. Briggs, do not, and the Doctor may be right when he considers *his* "Christianity" and "Christian theology" largely indebted to Philo and Socrates and similar holy men of God.

Here is some more Higher Criticism, taken from the last sermon in the series:

"The Gospel of St. Luke was written at a much earlier date than the Gospel of St. John, not far from the date of the Epistle to the Hebrews. This Gospel, in its preface, recognizes the use of written sources of an earlier date. Among these we may easily determine the primitive Gospel of St. Mark, and the original Gospel of St. Matthew in the Hebrew language, known as the Logia, or Sayings of Jesus. Besides these, St. Luke evidently used other documents for his story of the birth and infancy of Jesus. The main stock of the story is comprised in a series of Christian poems,

many of which have been used from the earliest times, as the Canticles of the Christian Church: such as the Ave Maria, the Magnificat, the Benedictus, the Nunc Dimittis. These were originally composed in the Hebrew language, with measured lines and strophical organization, and were, in all probability, among the earliest, if not the earliest Christian hymns. They were sung in Jewish Christian congregations before the destruction of Jerusalem, and therefore belong in the earliest group of Christian documents, the primary written sources of Christianity. We have seen that the doctrine of the incarnation as the divine Word becoming flesh was first sung in a hymn in the Greek congregations in Asia. The doctrine of the incarnation as a virgin birth is in a hymn of the Jewish congregation in Palestine, at least twenty years earlier.”¹⁾

“As has been said, this doctrine is in the Ave Maria, or Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin. This annunciation is in the form of a poem. It was written by an early Christian poet. It was certainly composed in the Jewish-Christian community in Palestine, which was nearest to the Virgin Mary. The author must, therefore, have known the mind of the Jerusalem or Galilean community as to the Mother of Christ Jesus.”²⁾

“One of the evidences of the early date of this doctrine, and of the hymn which enshrines it, is that it sings of the virgin birth of the Son of God, and seems to know nothing at all of his pre-existence. There is nothing in the hymn to suggest even ideal pre-existence.”³⁾

“As the ancient Jewish poet thought of the divine Spirit as hovering over primitive chaos with creative energy to bring light, life, and order out of it;⁴⁾ as another Jewish poet saw God Himself present in theophany, moulding the body of man out of clay soil, and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life,⁵⁾—so an early Christian poet conceived

1) Pp. 215 f. 2) P. 218. 3) P. 222. 4) Gen. 1. 5) Gen. 2.

of the divine Spirit as overshadowing the Virgin Mary, and imparting His divine power to enable her to conceive the man Jesus.'¹⁾

Enough of this. We might continue to copy pages of similar trash from the output of this poet-factory into which this preacher converts a Christian pulpit. Of course, it is of little consequence to Dr. Briggs whether the Ave Maria be the product of a fictitious poet or a revelation of the Holy Ghost. He says:—

“All that we have thus far learned of the incarnation, from the teaching of Jesus, and the writings of St. Paul, St. John, and the Epistle to the Hebrews, would stand firm if there had been no virgin birth; if Jesus had been born of Joseph and Mary, having father and mother, as any other child. Therefore the virgin birth is only one of many statements of the mode of the incarnation. It has no documentary value, no more intrinsic importance, than any other of the many we have thus far studied. The doctrine of the incarnation does not depend upon the virgin birth. Since all the other passages relating to the incarnation, except that of the Gospel of the Infancy, know nothing of the virgin birth, it is only a minor matter connected with the incarnation, and should have a subordinate place in the doctrine.”²⁾ Oh yes, the woman in the pew and her children may want the Virgin’s babe who was cradled in a manger. “The favorite idea of the incarnation among the people has ever been the simpler one of the virgin birth, as in the Ave Maria. The theologians have ever preferred the more profound doctrine of the Hymn of the Logos.”³⁾ So says the man in the pulpit; and by and by the woman in the pew may, under such influence and with a little superficial reading, learn to consider the “simpler idea” below her dignity also and leave it to her children and to the common people.

1) Pp. 225 f.

2) P. 217.

3) P. 224.

But what will the *man* in the pew have to say about these things? Well, in the first place, the probability is that the man will not be in the pew very much where preaching like that of Dr. Briggs has become acceptable. And if he be there, the probability is that he will say what the woman says and do as the woman does. When the devil dispenses his theology and people go to hear him, things are likely to take the course they took when Higher Criticism was first taught and practiced in Eden, where the question, "*Yea, hath God said?*" was followed by the negation, "*Ye shall not surely die,*" and the woman did eat of the forbidden fruit, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. There will be exceptions. There will be those who will go to hear Dr. Briggs as one goes to a menagerie. Even some of these may come to grief, as boys in a menagerie who go too near the cages. There will be men, especially lawyers and business men, who want facts and evidence, and there will also be women who want something whereon to base their faith; and all these will decline to invest in this kind of wildcat stock. But there are many who will take to popularized Higher Criticism, as boys in kneepants take to swearing and cigarettes, because it makes them feel big, while they are only bad boys.

A. G.

WHAT READEST THOU?

A Question to the Pastor.

What readest thou? is a question to which peculiar importance attaches in these days when there is such a vast amount of literature and such a wide range of choice between good and bad, profitable and unprofitable reading. In reading the eyes are the avenues to the inner man, and the matter read is the food for the mind and soul. Naturally, the effect will be similar as in taking food for the body.