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MYTHIC CHRISTS AND THE TRUE

A CRITICISM OF SOME MODERN THEORIES

By Rev. W. ST. CLAIR TISDALL, M.A., D.D.
Late James Long Lecturer on Oriental Religions.

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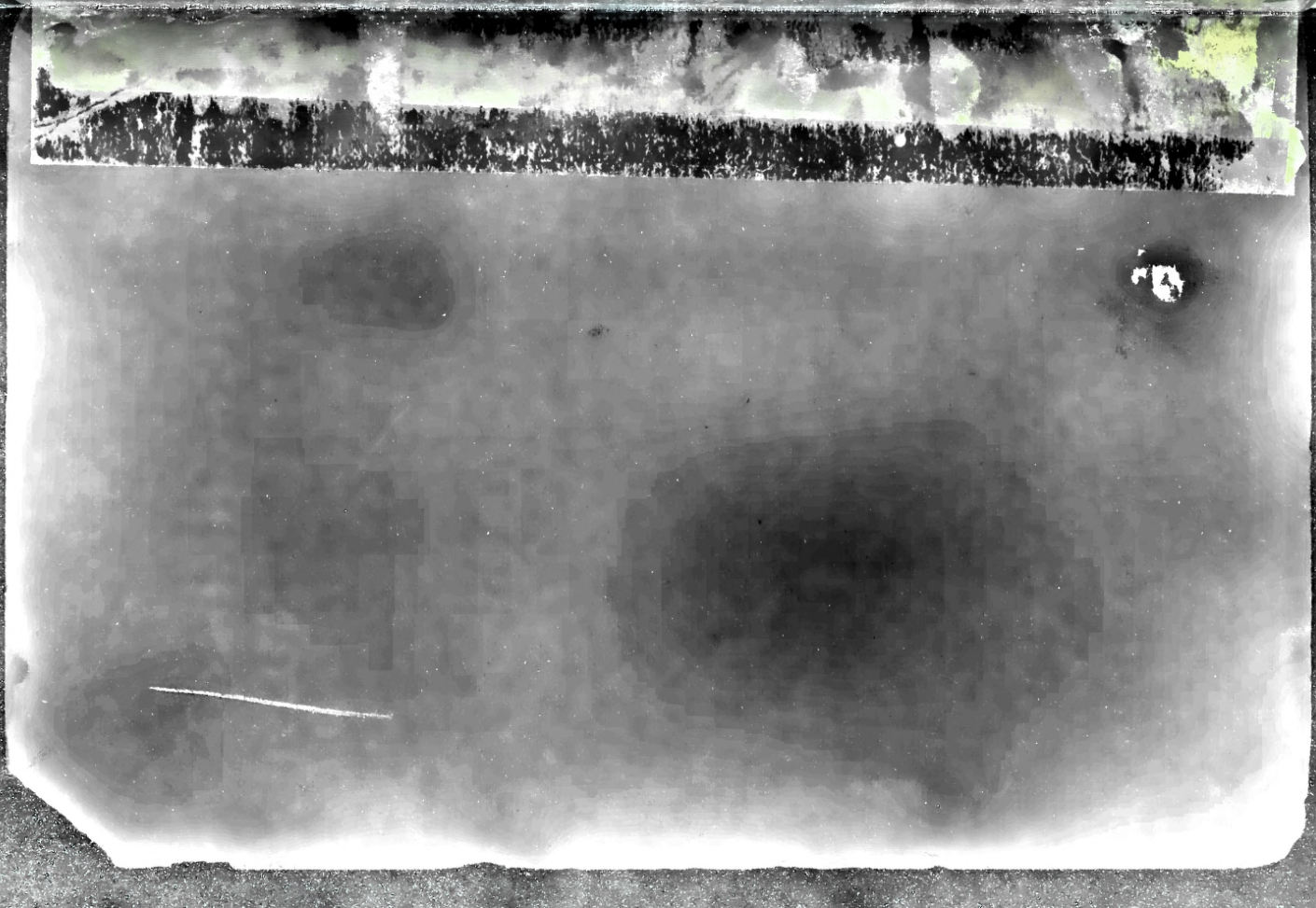

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It is interesting that not very
[illegible] It is no more convincing than a
[illegible] orthodox Hindu on Hinduism.
possible for an orthodox
[illegible] to be free from bias.
persons qualified to write on
[illegible] such as mythology and religion
[illegible] who are entirely free of all
kind of religious belief.

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PREFACE

"Our age,
Our weakling age, sick of a deadly doubt."

ONE of the most urgent needs of the present time is that of men who will think for themselves and not be "driven about by every wind of doctrine." In many cases, it is true, the struggle for daily bread is nowadays so acute that not a few busy men and women have neither time nor energy to devote themselves to deep study. At the same time they are ready and willing to accept the latest information which they can obtain on all matters of importance. We know that some people are specialists in scientific matters, others in archæology, others in other subjects, and we are for the most part compelled to take for granted the results which such men have reached by their learned researches. Natural as this attitude is in certain respects, it is not wise to adopt it too readily in religious matters. "Call no man your father upon earth," "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good," are Scriptural maxims which commend themselves to our common sense and to our English love of freedom. We should practise these directions more than we do. If we must consult a physician, let us make sure beforehand that he is not a quack. Let us not rashly stake the moral and religious interests of ourselves

and of those who are near and dear to us for time and for eternity on the unsupported assertions of the first person we meet who makes an attack on Christianity and the Bible. Let us occasionally doubt our own doubts. The Christian Faith has resisted the billows and storms of nearly nineteen centuries, and it is therefore at least unlikely that the "gates of Hades" will now "prevail against it," the more so because all or almost all the arguments brought against it to-day have been used again and again before our time without success.

The desire to be "up-to-date" in matters of thought does not generally exert undue influence upon men of sober earnestness and common sense, such as those for whom this little book is mainly intended. But more shallow minds—though for them too Christ died and rose again—more readily yield to the temptation to be "abreast of the times," as they think. The result of this want of thought too often is that worn-out theories and long exploded errors are for a time accepted as the latest discoveries of the most enlightened age in the world's history. This is not the best way of being "up-to-date." Let us study, and think, and *pray*.

At the present moment not a few writers, some of them men of learning, others men who have no claim to be considered such, are endeavouring to convince "the man in the street" that certain leading doctrines of Christianity have been borrowed from heathenism. In some cases these people are ignorant of what the doctrines they are assailing really are. In nearly every instance the assailant shews that he has never

devoted any careful study to Christian evidences. Not unfrequently it becomes evident from the language he uses that he is absolutely unaware that such things exist! If, besides this degree of ignorance, he possesses a perfervid imagination, he is in a position to write, in all good faith, a book admirably calculated to cause deep spiritual distress to those who are not well grounded in their faith in Christ, who have no personal knowledge of the Master Himself, but merely a more or less traditionary belief in Him. If this feeling of distress causes them to enquire and so learn the certainty of those things wherein they have (or *should* have) been instructed, the result will be good for themselves in every way. Enquiry may lead them to genuine personal knowledge of the Master, whom to know is everlasting life.

It is in the hope of being able to help those who are really in earnest in seeking the truth that I have written this little book. It is the result of years of study of Oriental religions and of their sacred books. My sceptical mind has forced me to doubt other men's statements about the teaching contained in these, and has thus compelled me to study them in their original languages. Therefore I base my conclusions not on other people's assertions, but on my own researches.

I candidly confess that I once myself knew by painful experience the agony of religious doubt and uncertainty on the most vital of all subjects. It therefore seems to me a simple matter of duty, now that I know the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, to

strive to remove difficulties from other men's paths. If in any measure I succeed in this, it will be its own reward.

In the course of my study of anti-Christian works, I must regretfully acknowledge that I have not always been impressed with the conviction that their authors desired at any cost to find out and declare "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," though one naturally starts with that assumption and endeavours to cling to it to the end in every case.

The nineteenth century produced quite a large crop of theories more or less opposed to Christianity. It was an age of hasty and ill-considered conclusions. The tide is now turning. What has well been said regarding Wolf's hypothesis about the Homeric poems is true also in reference to much that has been written against the Christian faith. "The operose constructions of the German professors" (and English sciolists) "are being obliterated, like a child's sand castles, by the returning tide of sense" (*Times*, lit. supplement, 8th March, 1907).

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MITHRA AND MODERN MYTHS

MYTHS being the offspring of credulity and ignorance, it is not surprising that they should spring up in our own day, when our magazines tell of "Julia's" latest feats in calligraphy and some of our London papers question whether the Christ of the Gospels ever lived at all. We find so many modern myths in this country, all professing to be very ancient and to give true and reliable accounts of the stories current in heathen lands about various deities and heroes, that their existence and the credit which they obtain shew that the age of miracles is not past. The credulity of the incredulous is a daily miracle. Provided that the person who writes a book or an article on any Oriental religion or philosophy is able to shew his gross ignorance of Christianity and his utter lack of acquaintance with Eastern languages, he is apparently at once accepted by most of our fellow-countrymen as an authority upon all these points. To dispute his "conclusions" is to prove one's own ignorance and "narrowmindedness," all the more so should one have spent a large part of one's life in the study of such subjects and among those who profess the religions and philosophies in question. It bears out

the classical proverb, "The people wish to be deceived, let them be so."

To the mere student of things Eastern this attitude of "Modern Thought" (*lucus a non lucendo*) in England is full of interest. His Oriental studies have given him some acquaintance at first-hand with the mythology of the East, and he fondly fancies that he knows all about Kṛishṇa and his mother Devakī, Mithra and the "Petra Genetrix," Isis and the infant Horus. As he has probably consulted the "Ethnic Scriptures" in which these tales are told, and read them in their original languages, there is some excuse for this fancy on his part. But when he turns to modern English books and periodicals, he finds an entirely new collection of tales on these very subjects, tales for the most part unknown to the worshippers of the deities in question. To his jaded mind these have, at least, all the charm of utter novelty. He has certainly never read or heard anything of the kind before. He often finds authorities quoted for the assertions made by the writers of these wonderful stories. Should he take the trouble to consult these authorities, he finds either that they have evidently been misunderstood, or that they actually assert something quite contrary to what they are quoted in support. Occasionally the chapter or verse referred to *does not exist* in the book quoted. The student is surprised at all this, but he concludes that no man in his senses would accept as true assertions so baseless, and statements made by men who have at least shewn no knowledge whatever of the subjects on which they write. He is therefore astounded to find hard-headed business men, men priding themselves on their common-sense and the impossibility of taking them in, men who would not risk a penny in business transactions without long and careful scrutiny—to find these men blindly

accepting such romances without enquiry, and staking their present and future happiness upon the correctness of asserted "facts" which are destitute of a shade of proof. There are, no doubt, reasons for this strange attitude of mind, for this marvellous credulity, but justification there cannot be. Even a very casual enquiry would, in many cases, shew the phenomenal inaccuracy of many modern disquisitions upon Comparative Religion and kindred subjects. But our credulous unbeliever has no time for enquiry. Besides, he is too certain of his "conclusions" to care to examine the ground on which they are based. Possibly it might turn out to be another instance of "terminological inexactitude," and this is an age of myth-making. Why should not modern myths be as good as ancient ones and quite as reliable? Besides, enquiry might shew that Christ was true, and that might suggest the duty of honourably keeping one's baptismal vow. On the whole, then, many a man prefers not to enquire, not to think, though he calls himself a sceptic (enquirer) and talks loudly of "free thought," which to him seems to mean freedom from thought.

We proceed to adduce evidence to prove this as far as Mithra is concerned.

A modern writer on the subject, who tells us that his book "challenges[1] criticism above all by its thesis," informs us that "vigilant scholars confess that we know very little as to the Mithraic religion,"[2] and that "we cannot hope to find much direct knowledge." Yet he proceeds, as do others, to afford us a complete account of the legends and the inmost theology of the Mithraists, together with details of its origin. All this he has warned us is not "direct

[1] Mr. J. M. Robertson, *Pagan Christs*, preamble, p. xi., ed. of 1903.

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 292.

knowledge," and so we should be prepared to find that his "imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown, and . . . gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name." This unquestionably is what we do find in his book and in others on the same lines. A few examples will suffice to show this.

Mr. Robertson says, "Mithra[1] comes to occupy a singular position as between the two great Powers of good and evil, Ōrmazd and Ahriman . . . being actually named the MEDIATOR (Plutarch, *Isis, and Osiris*, cap. 46; Julian, *in Regem Solem*, capp. 9, 10, 12), and figuring to the devout eye as a humane and beneficent God, nearer to men than the Great Spirit of Good, a Saviour, a Redeemer, eternally young, Son of the Most High, and a preserver of mankind from the Evil One. In brief, he is a Pagan Christ." "The *Khorda Avesta*[2] (xxvi., 107) styles Mithra 'the Word.' In the *Vendidad* (Fargand xix. 15) Zarathustra speaks of Mithra, Sraosha, 'the Holy Word,' thus joining Mithra with 'the Word.' . . . The Mithraic[3] mysteries, then, of the burial and resurrection of the Lord, the Mediator and Saviour; burial in a rock tomb and resurrection from that tomb: the sacrament of bread and water, the marking on the forehead with a mystic mark, all these were in practice . . . before the publication of the Christian Gospel of a Lord who was buried in a rock tomb, and rose from that tomb on the day of the sun." He then endeavours to find some fragment of proof that Mithra was regarded as Virgin-born, and, though he fails in the search, he nevertheless says, "It[4] was further practically a matter of course that his divine mother should be styled Virgin," and asserts that he figures "as supernaturally born of

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 304.
[2] *Op. cit.*, pp. 329, 330.
[3] *Op. cit.*, pp. 333, 334.
[4] *Op. cit.*, p. 339.

a Virgin Mother and of the Most High God" in the fourth and fifth centuries, quoting the authority of an Armenian Christian writer. We shall see later what this authority does actually say, and how far he is from supporting such a statement.

Men of our own age are popularly supposed to be so ignorant on these matters that a writer of the same school of "thought" ventured to publish an article on Mithraism and kindred subjects in the *Nineteenth Century—and After* a few years ago, in which the following passage occurs:—

". . . Just[1] as the religion of Isis[2] did, [Mithraism] resembled that of Christ in being a religion of inward holiness, of austere self-discipline and purity; but the details of its resemblance are incomparably more close and curious. . . . According to Mithraic theology, God, considered in His totality, is a Being so infinite and so transcendent that His direct connexion with man and the universe is inconceivable. In order to become the father of man and Creator, He manifested Himself in a second personality, namely Mithra, who was in his cosmic character identified with the 'unconquered sun,' and, as a moral and intellectual being, was the Divine Word or Reason, and, in more senses than one, the 'Mediator' between man and the Most High. . . . This Divine Saviour came into the world as an infant. His first worshippers were shepherds; and the day of his nativity was December 25th. His followers preached a severe and rigid morality, chief among their virtues being temperance, chastity, renunciation and self-control. . . . They had seven sacraments, of which the most important were baptism, confirmation, and an Eucharistic Supper, at which the communicants partook of the divine nature of Mithra under the species of bread and wine."

[1] *Nineteenth Century* for September, 1905, p. 496. [2] *Vide* p. 85.

If we know all this about Mithra, we know a great deal, and Mr. Robertson is too modest in speaking of our knowledge as being very slight on the subject. Noticing that all the phrases which are employed in the above extracts are those used in Christian theology, some of them of quite recent coinage, others found in Holy Scripture, and most actually copied from the *English* Authorised Version of the Bible, we enquire with great interest what Mithraic literature there is whence these modern exponents of the faith learnt all the exact details which they so graphically lay before us. Perhaps we carry our researches further and look for Mithraic Scriptures in the "Sacred Books of the East" series. We do not find them there, nor is the reason far to seek. *There are no Mithraic Scriptures extant.*

A German writer, A. Dieterich, indeed, not long since published a Greek document, edited from a papyrus now in Paris, which he called a Mithraic Liturgy.[1] Possibly it is Mithraic, though the great authority on the subject, Prof. Cumont, denies this, but it is certainly not a liturgy, nor does it state *one single doctrine* of Mithraism. It does not even form the one solitary exception which is said to prove the rule.

All the materials upon which our knowledge of Mithraism, properly so called, depends are contained in Prof. Cumont's *Textes et Monuments Figurés relatifs aux Mystères de Mithra.*[2] A short English translation without the original quotations has also appeared. It is easy for anyone who is really in earnest upon the subject, therefore, to ascertain exactly how much and how little we know about Mithraic theology. He will find that we have no proof whatever of the greater part of the "facts"

[1] A. Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie.* (Teubner, Leipzig, 1903.)
[2] Two vols., Bruxelles, 1899–1906.

stated in the extracts given above. The writers who endeavour to represent Mithra as a "Pagan Christ" have openly borrowed the phrases they use from Christianity itself, and less honestly still do they read Christian doctrines into Mithraism. Besides the few sculptures which have been found representing Mithra's birth (not from a Virgin, but) from a rock, and his killing a bull, these writers depend upon the references to Mithraism which a few Christian and heathen, mostly Greek and Latin, authors make. An *earlier* stage of the worship of Mithra is, however, known to us from certain parts of the ancient Sacred Books of India and Persia. These we shall have to examine, in order to enquire whether they lend any support whatever to such assertions as those which we are considering.

Mithra was worshipped by the ancient Âryans of both India and Persia before and after their separation from one another. The verses in the *Rig-Veda* and the *Avestā* in which he is mentioned, assign him such lofty attributes that very probably at a remote period of antiquity he did represent a by no means degraded conception of the Divine. Such lofty ideas about God we find in some measure in the most ancient records of all religions which we are able to investigate. But in all Ethnic faiths the conception becomes gradually debased, and Mithra forms no exception.

In the *Rig-Veda*, Mithra (or, as he is there styled, *Mitra*) appears for the most part in close connexion with Varuṇa or the personified "Heaven." He is sometimes associated with other gods, and is rarely alone. His name signifies "Friend," and he is styled *priyatamas nṛiṇām*, "most beloved by men" (R.V. Maṇḍala vii., Hy. 62, *v.* 4). Varuṇa and he behold all things through their common Eye, the Sun, but they are spoken of as two distinct gods

(R.V., Maṇḍ. vii., Hy. 61, *v.* 1). Mitra is the eldest of the seven Âdityas or sons of Aditi, the goddess of the infinite expanse, and her husband Kašyapa. "He is greater than earth and sky; he supports all the gods" (R.V., Maṇḍ. iii., Hy. 59, *vv.* 7 and 8). But as in Vedic times Varuṇa himself had already begun to give way to inferior gods, and gradually to cease to be worshipped, so Mitra too was evidently receding into oblivion.

In Persia also it is certain that Zoroastrianism tended to lower the position which he had previously held in men's minds. The *Avestā* does not include him among the seven Amesha Spentas, or "Bountiful Immortals," who correspond with the Âdityas of India. Yet in some passages language is used of him which shews that there was a tendency to regard him as a rival to Ahura Mazda (Ōrmazd) himself. To counteract this perhaps he was sometimes said to have been created by the latter of equal dignity, as we read in *Yasht* x., 1:—

"Ahura Mazda said to beneficent Zarathustra (Zoroaster), 'Then, when I created (set forth) Mithra, owner of broad pastures, O beneficent one, then I rendered him as great in worshipfulness, as great in venerableness, as even myself, Ahura Mazda.'"

As he was associated with Varuṇa in the *Rig-Veda* so in the *Avestā* we sometimes find him worshipped in connexion with Ahura Mazda, as for instance in *Yasht* x., *v.* 145:—

"Mithra, Ahura, the lofty ones, the imperishable, the righteous, do we praise: both stars and moon and sun, over the *baresman*-twigs: Mithra, lord of all the provinces, do we honour."

Mithra was regarded as the deity who punished untruth and breach of faith, and his wisdom was such that we are told (*Yasht* x., *v.* 107), "Greater natural wisdom attendeth not earthly mortal in the

world than even the natural wisdom which attendeth heavenly Mithra." But he soon became identified with the Sun, or perhaps with the *fravashi* or Genius which ruled the latter, for *v.* 136 of the same *Yasht* says of him :—

"Mithra, owner of broad pastures, the watchful one, do we honour, him whom red swift yoked steeds draw in a chariot with one golden wheel: and his spear-points are all-resplendent if one bears offerings towards his abode."

Here we notice his "one wheel" (*cakhra*=the Sanskrit *cakra*, also meaning "disc of the sun"), his *red* steeds, his "spear-points all-resplendent," that is to say, the rays of the sun. Hence in later Mithraism the god is represented as shooting an arrow into a rock (the sky or a cloud) and bringing out water. So too he kills the bull (that is, he fertilizes the ground) by striking him with his knife, that is, with the solar rays.

Mithra not only maintains good on earth, but he also aids Ahura Mazda in the age-long contest with Añro-Mainyuš (Ahriman) and his creatures. As the sun at night visits the Underworld, so Mithra becomes *one* of the deities who govern the region of the dead. Hence at the end of the world, when men come to be tried and endeavour to cross the Chinvaṭ bridge, Mithra is to be associated with Sraosha and Rashnu in the task of judging them. Even now he is considered to be one of the deities to whom worship is due. Hence in the Pahlavī "*Patēt*," or Confession, the penitent acknowledges his offence "Before the Creator Ōrmazd and the Ameshōspands and before the good Law of the Mazda-worshippers, before Mithra, Srōsh and Rashnu, before the heavenly Īzeds, before the earthly Īzeds," as well as before the spirit of Zoroaster and the religious officials of his faith.

Professor Hermann Oldenberg styles Mithra "the extremely ancient Sun-god," and rightly says that he was "undoubtedly one of the most prominent figures in the popular faith of the Iranian peoples, and also in the worship of the Achæmenian kings." Though his name does not occur in Darius' Inscriptions, yet Artaxerxes Mnēmōn and Artaxerxes Ochus couple him with Ahura Mazda and the goddess Anāhita when they pray to these deities for the protection of their empire. In Darius' time, although the "clan-gods" are at least once mentioned as worthy of honour, yet otherwise Ahura Mazda is spoken of in terms which would befit a monotheist. But even in the *Avesta* itself we find polytheism fully adopted. In the *Vendīdād* (Fargand xix. § 13) Ahura Mazda bids Zoroaster invoke "Limitless Time" (*Zrvān Akarana*[1]) as well as Vāyu the atmosphere, the Winds, and "the holy, fair daughter of Ahura Mazda" (Spenta Ārmaiti, the Genius of the Earth). It is not at all strange, therefore, to find that the fully-developed Mithraism of later times associated itself with the worship of all kinds of other deities.

We have seen that Mr. J. M. Robertson in his clever work of imagination, confounding Zoroastrianism with much later Mithraism to some degree, informs us that the *Khorda Avestā* styles Mithra "The Word," and hence would have us form a certain conclusion regarding the origin of the Christian doctrine of the Divine Reason. In proof of his assertion he quotes chapter xxvi. 107, of the work cited. *There is no such chapter in existence*, if we may consider the standard edition of the original

[1] Mr. J. M. Robertson's remark that Mithraism borrowed its enigmatical "Supreme God," Kronos-Zervan (which he calls "a Babylonian conception") in Armenia, and was thus "prepared in Armenia for its cosmopolitan career in the western world" (*Pagan Christs*, p. 302) is therefore lacking in accuracy.

text, Professor Karl Geldner's, as an authority. But possibly this is merely a printer's error, though an unfortunate one. We may remark, however, that the title of "Word," given to Mithra alike in *Pagan Christs* and in the *Nineteenth Century* article we have quoted, *also fails to occur* in the *Avestā*. Nor is Mithra there entitled the Divine Reason. Mr. Robertson also tells us that Mithra is *associated* with the "Word" in Fargānd, xix. 15, of the *Vendīdād*. If this were true, it would shew that Mithra *was not identified* with the Divine Word, though this identification has previously been distinctly asserted by our exponent of Mithraism. Where, then, does the Logos doctrine as derived in some measure from the latter come in? But the fact is that the *Avestā nowhere* contains any doctrine of the Divine Logos at all. The proper translation of the verse runs thus (it is supposed to be spoken by Ahura Mazda):—

"A *speech* (*vakhshem*) did Zoroaster utter to me: 'I invoke, O Ahura Mazda, Righteous One, the Creation, the Law, I invoke Mithra, owner of wide pastures, well-armed, most brilliant in his conquests, most victorious in his conquests; I, grasping in hand weapons against the head of the demons, invoke Sraosha, Ashi, the well-formed." The word *vakhshem* here evidently means "speech," for the very speech itself follows in the verse, as is evident from the translation. It is *not* Ahura Mazda's but Zoroaster's. It has no nearer connexion with Mithra than with the other beings and things invoked therein along with him. We may be pardoned for failing to find any doctrine of the Divine Logos here.

Possibly, however, Mr. Robertson intended rather to refer to the fourteenth verse in the same chapter. There the phrase *māthro spento*, "sacred text," has sometimes been rather carelessly rendered "Holy Word." He may have been misled by some such

translation, a thing impossible for a person at all acquainted with the original language. *Mãthro* is the same as the Sanskrit *mantra*, "a hymn," and the context shews that the reference here is to the *sacred text of the Avestã*, which was supposed to be revealed by Ahura Mazda, "whose spirit is the sacred text" (*yēnhē urva mãthrō spentō*), as this verse states. The passage in Mr. Robertson's book which we are criticising, in accordance with his already quoted invitation, is a very admirable instance of the danger incurred by depending upon an *English version* of an Oriental work. Our author first reads Christian theology into books in which nothing of the kind occurs, and then triumphantly points out how clearly such doctrines have been derived from Ethnic sources!

Having thus far dealt with Mithra in Vedic Hindūism and in Avestic Zoroastrianism, we have now to consider the origin and progress of Mithraism, properly so called, which differs from both at least as much as Buddhism does from Hindūism. To confound these religions with one another is hardly a proof of competence to discuss the subject.

The first European writer who mentions Mithra is the old Greek historian Herodotus. His worship was then apparently confined to Persia itself. Herodotus (i. 131) tells us that the Persians gave the name Mithra to the goddess Aphrodite or Venus, whom he associates with the abominations of Mylitta-worship at Babylon. This is doubtless a mistake, since Mithra was a god, not a goddess. But his very mistake gives good reason to surmise that he knew of Mithra's close association with the licentious rites early connected with Anãhita, a Persian goddess whom the Greeks called Anaïtis. This is the first reason we have for doubting whether the religion of Mithra "resembled that of Christ in being a religion

of inward holiness, of austere self-discipline and purity," as the writer in the *Nineteenth Century*, already quoted, asserts. We shall find plenty of other proofs to the contrary to adduce further on. Even in early days in Persia, though Mithra was the guardian of Truth, he is not asserted to be that of Purity. As he was said to fertilise the earth with his rays, and was early associated with Anāhita (which Mr. Robertson admits, p. 344, and which we learn from the Inscriptions of the Achæmenian Kings), and since it is acknowledged (*Pagan Christs*, p. 339), that this Anāhita was a goddess of "fruitfulness and nutriency," Mithra can hardly have been ever regarded as encouraging this particular virtue. It seems almost a pity to mar the fair picture presented to us by the poetic imagination of our opponents, but our appeal is to fact and not to fiction.

Alexander the Great's conquests brought Persia into close connexion with the Western world. Hence it was that Mithra-worship, more or less affected and corrupted by the Babylonian cult of the Sun-god Shamshu perhaps, gradually became better known in other lands. It seems never to have spread among the Greeks. But when the Cilician pirates, who would naturally be drawn to the service of "a humane and beneficent God" and a religion "of inward holiness, of austere self-discipline and purity," were captured by Pompey (Plutarch, *Life of Pompey*, ch. xxiv.) and brought to Italy, they introduced into Rome the worship of their god Mithra (B.C. 68). For many years no attempt seems to have been made to spread the religion, and it was still confined in the main to slaves and others who had come from the East. It formed an "intimate union" at Rome with "the mysteries of the Great Mother," Cybele (Cumont, *Mysteries of Mithra*, English version, p. 19, cf. pp. 30, 86, 87,

179, 198), than which few rites were more licentious. Everyone is aware of the infamous practices of her priests, the Galli, and of the association therewith of the story of Attis. The original conception of Mithra had been, as we have seen, a noble one; but there seems too much reason to fear that, in company with that of Anāhita, it had undergone moral degradation. Otherwise it would not have been possible for Mithra and Cybele to have been worshipped "in intimate communion with each other throughout the entire extent of the Empire" (Cumont, p. 179), or at least in every part of it into which Mithraism finally spread. For, though Mr. Robertson says: "Mithraism was, in point of range, the most nearly universal religion of the Western world in the early centuries of the Christian era" (p. 289), yet this statement requires modification. Cumont informs us that, at first at least, "The influence of this small band of sectaries on the great mass of the Roman population was virtually as infinitesimal as is to-day the influence of Buddhist societies in modern Europe" (*Mysteries*, p. 37). "It was not until the end of the first century that the name of Mithra," he says, "began to be generally bruited abroad in Rome." In Plutarch's time (46–125 A.D.) "the Mazdean sect already enjoyed a certain notoriety in the Occident." Of Roman writers the first to mention it is Statius in his *Thebais* (Book I., fin.), about 80 A.D. Then, and throughout its whole subsequent course in the West, the worship of Mithra was recognised as being simply and solely adoration of the Sun, with whom inscriptions found especially in Germany, but also in Dacia, Southern Gaul, England, and other countries, openly identify the god. His shrines or chapels were usually underground, and in those which have been discovered are found in Greek and Latin such inscriptions as "To the Sungod Mithra," "To Mithra the unconquered Sun."

Mithraism was largely a soldiers' religion, and this explains why it was carried by the legions to so many parts of the Empire. The worshippers of Mithra "rated strength higher than gentleness, and preferred courage to lenity. From their long association with barbarous religions there was perhaps a residue of cruelty in their ethics" (Cumont, p. 142). The oldest Mithraic inscriptions found at Rome date from the reigns of Trajan (A.D. 98–117) and Hadrian (A.D. 117–138). Sculptures represent Mithra as a youth wearing a Phrygian cap, starting forth from a rock. In his hand he holds a torch. In others he is a vigorous young man with one knee planted upon a bull, into whose neck he has driven a dagger. Boys holding torches stand by him. A dog licks up the flowing blood of the bull, as sometimes does a serpent also. A scorpion has seized the bull, and a raven stands near at hand. These probably are connected with the signs of the Zodiac through which the Sun passes. Elsewhere Mithra as the Solar archer shoots an arrow into the rock or cloud, whence flows a stream of water.

Porphyry, on the authority of Eubulus, tells us that the worshippers of Mithra were divided into a number of different Orders, all believing in the Transmigration of Souls, and that the members of the highest order, the "Fathers," who were styled Eagles and Hawks, abstained from animal food. He says that the "Initiated" who took part in their "orgies" were, if men called Lions, if women, Hyænas. Some say that there were seven classes,[1] Ravens, Griffins, Soldiers, Lions, Persians, Sun-runners, and Fathers, the Ravens being the lowest order who waited on the others. Tertullian says that they had "virgins and continent men" among them. Others deny that women were

[1] It is to the initiatory rites undergone on entering these that modern Mythology gives the title of "Sacraments."

allowed to join at all in the worship of Mithra, and say that they were compelled to adore Cybele instead. Nonnus tells us that eighty different kinds of tortures were inflicted upon those who were being initiated into the Mysteries: others say twelve, among which are mentioned the test by fire and water, by hunger, thirst and cold, by flogging, bleeding, branding with hot irons, and the threat of being murdered. Some at least of these, in particular the scourging and the ablutions, originated in the ancient Persian rites (Cumont, p. 6), others in Stoic ideas, which had a "profound influence" on Mithraism. The religion probably borrowed from Persia belief in a resurrection, if it was not rather in transmigration. The doctrine of a "renovation" or resurrection is found only in very late portions of the *Avesta*, composed when the Persians had for hundreds of years had large Israelite colonies dwelling in the very midst of their empire, at Ecbatana (Achmetha, now Hamadān) and elsewhere. There can be no doubt that it was derived from Israel. They had the custom of "baptising" certain of their number (if we may use the term baptism in the loose way in which our opponents do) in the blood of a bull. This, the *taurobolion*, was borrowed from the worship of Cybele. Sacrifices of more than one kind were offered in their subterranean temples. Lampridius (*Commodus*, cap. ix.) tells us that the latter Emperor (A.D. 180–192) was admitted to take part in the mystic rites of Mithraism, and that as part of the ceremony he caused a human being to be murdered in reality (and not only in pretence, as at that time seems usually to have been the case). But amid the strange and terrible rites by means of which the neophyte was initiated on ordinary occasions was, Cumont says, "a simulated murder, which in its origin was undoubtedly real" (p. 161). The Church historian Socrates tells us that

in A.D. 362, when a deserted temple of Mithra at Alexandria was being removed, many human skulls were discovered, which proved that human sacrifices had been offered there (Bk. III., chap. ii., §§ 2–6).

One of the noteworthy things about Mithraism is the way in which it won the favour of so many of the Roman Emperors, generally the worst of them. When King Tiridates of Armenia came to Rome, Nero (A.D. 54–68) expressed a wish to be initiated into the mysteries, and Tiridates adored in Nero an emanation from Mithra himself (Cumont, pp. 85, 86). The Emperors Aurelian, Diocletian, Galerius, and Licinius, as well as Julian the Apostate, openly favoured Mithraism, which was then at the zenith of its power, and was destined to fade away gradually before the spread of the Gospel. Julian (A.D. 361–3), being an apostate from Christianity, seems to have applied to Mithra some Christian titles.

Mithraism, "far from hostility towards the ancient Græco-Roman beliefs . . . sought to accommodate itself to them, in appearance at least. A pious mystic could, without renouncing his faith, dedicate a votive inscription to the Capitoline triad, Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva" (Cumont, pp. 175–7). In the fourth century the high priests of the religion "were found performing the highest offices of the priesthood in temples of all sorts" (*ibid.*). "In the region of the Rhine the Celtic divinities were worshipped in the crypts of the Persian god, or at least alongside of them."

Professor Cumont shews clearly that it was to Mithraism that we must trace the assumption of divine titles by the emperors of Rome. The attempt to supersede all other worship by the adoration of the Emperor, regarded as in some degree the incarnation of the Sun-god, was blasted, after a fierce struggle carried on for centuries, only by the faithfulness of the Christians, who preferred death to apostasy.

Therefore a battle to the death continued for many generations between Christianity and Mithraism. It culminated in the utter defeat of the latter and its ultimate extinction. Yet we are now gravely assured that Christians mistook Mithraism for their own faith, and adopted as their creed the leading tenets of their deadliest foe. What they had previously believed about their Divine Master and Lord, for whom so many of them had died by fire in Nero's gardens, by the sword, by the teeth of wild beasts, through forced labour in deadly mines, and by indescribable and manifold tortures, was, according to our modern mythologists, so vague and ill-defined that it practically vanished from their minds, leaving room for the tenets of the great rival faith. Or, if we are not prepared to believe all this, we are invited to credit the assertion that the very first disciples of Christ, the men who have given us the New Testament, completely forgot all that they had seen and heard of His life and teaching, and quite innocently fell into the error of attributing to Him the details of a Mithraic myth which, in the form in which its modern expounders have stated it, *had not yet come into existence!*

Mr. Robertson informs us, as we have seen, that Mithra figures "as supernaturally born of a Virgin mother and of the Most High God" in the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian era. In proof of this he refers to the reply of the Christian bishops of Armenia to the Persian viceroy Mihr Nerseh's attack upon Christianity, as quoted by Elisæus (Eghishê) the Armenian historian. *Nothing whatever of the sort occurs there.* The reply contains only two references to Mithra. In one of these the Persians are quoted as saying *Mihr astouads i knochē dsanau*, "the god Mithra was born of a woman"; in the other we are informed that a Persian sage had

affirmed that *Mihr astouads mairadsin ē i mardkanē*, "The god Mithra is incestuously born of a mortal mother" (Elisæus, *Concerning the Vardans and the Armenian War*, Armenian original, Venice, 1864, Book II., pp. 53 and 57). It requires a vigorous imagination to read Virgin-birth into these statements. Mithraic sculptures in Europe do not even recognise Mithra's birth of a mortal at all, but uniformly represent him as springing from the "Petra Genetrix," or "Rock Mother." Nor does another ancient Armenian writer, Eznik, say anything to support Mr. Robertson's contention, though he tells us that the Persians believed that the sun (*Khorashet*) would die (*Refutation of Heresies*, Arm. original, Constantinople edition, 1873, Book II., pp. 133, 134). Nor does the Ἀπαθανατισμός, published by A. Dieterich under the title *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, contain one syllable about Mithra's virgin-birth. The tenet, in short, owes its origin to modern mythology.

It is not difficult to understand the genuine legend. Mithra is represented as born of a rock, because in Vedic Sanskrit the word *aśman*, and in Avestic Persian *asman* means not only *rock* but also *cloud* and *sky*. The Sun-god does rise in the sky. Mithra's struggle with the bull and his slaughter of the animal, reluctantly undertaken at Ahura Mazda's command, are at least once in sculpture so represented as to give his countenance a look of reluctance. This has been seized upon by some modern opponents of Christianity. By depicting the face only of the god, apart from the rest of the engraving, they endeavour to support their bestowal of the title of "Suffering Saviour" on Mithra. As the Avestic word *Gāuš* means "the earth" as well as "cow, ox, bull," and as the word denoting the animal's "soul" (*urvan*) comes from the same root as does *urvarā* (plant, tree), the myth evidently shews forth

the fact that by piercing the earth with his dagger-like rays the Sun enables the vegetable creation to spring forth.

Mithra was originally the god of a pastoral people in Persia. Hence it is not surprising that a rude sculpture depicts two herdsmen standing near the spot where he emerges from the rock or cloud. But our modern mythologists mistake these for shepherds, and on this slender substructure inform us that one of the beliefs of the Mithraites was that "this Divine Saviour came into the world as an infant," and "His first worshippers were shepherds." Having thus invented a legend for which they have no good and sufficient authority, and bestowed a title borrowed from Christianity upon Mithra, they speak of a "close and curious resemblance" between their newly-coined myth and the Gospel narrative of Christ's birth.

In a precisely similar way they inform us that Mithra was "in more senses than one the 'Mediator' between man and the Most High." The sole foundation for this confident assertion is Plutarch's statement that, in the religion of the Zoroastrians, Mithra was called μεσίτης, because he stood midway between the Good Principal, Ōrmazd, and the Evil Principal, Ahriman (*De Iride et Osiride*, cap. 46). Our opponents' deduction from these premisses is doubtless ingenious, but can scarcely be denominated scholarly or even honest. Plutarch goes on to say that the Persians worshipped and offered sacrifices to both the Good and the Evil Principle, and that, mixing a wolf's blood with the juice of the *moly* (by which he doubtless means the *haoma*-plant), they used to pour out the libation "in a sunless place." As his statements are incorrect about the Zoroastrians, they may refer to the Mithraists, who worshipped in caves. If his worshippers really held him to be a

"middle-man" between Ōrmazd and Ahriman, we can the better understand Mithra's undoubted association with Cybele, Baal, and other such immoral deities. But this hardly seems consonant with the statement that his religion was one "of inward holiness, of austere self-discipline and purity."

We are asked to believe that there existed a striking likeness between "the *repeated* lustrations and ablutions" of the Mithraists and Christian baptism, which was *never repeated*, and between their sacred repast, at which the initiated ate bread and drank water together, and the Lord's Supper—especially because it is conjectured that sometimes wine was mixed with the water. It is apparently forgotten that lustrations and sacrificial banquets are among the most ancient and widespread rites of nearly all Ethnic religions, and that they existed among the Jews ages before Mithraism came into contact with the Western world. Any resemblances in this respect between Christianity and Mithraism are more apparent than real, and they are far more than counterbalanced by the vast differences between the two religions in spirit, practice, and (as far as anything can be ascertained of Mithraic doctrines) belief. Even in connexion with the sacred banquet of the Mithraists this is observable. "In a picture of the 'Banquet of the Seven Priests' in the Mithraic Catacomb there are found phrases of the 'Eat and drink, for to-morrow we die' order," as Mr. Robertson himself has to admit (*Pagan Christs*, p. 345)—a spirit very different from the Christian. It is true that he endeavours to remove the effect of this admission by the perfectly gratuitous supposition that these words were "inscribed in a hostile spirit by the hands of Christian invaders of the Mithraic retreat." But a cause which requires to be supported by such baseless suppositions is self-condemned. We require

at least a small amount of fact to prove his main point, and we are given instead theories, conjectures, and imagination enough to produce a new *Vera Historia* of a modern Lucian.

When Ahriman shall have done his worst, according to old Persian belief (whether accepted by Mithraists or not we have no means of knowing), Mithra will kill another marvellous bull, mingle its fat with wine, and by giving his people this beverage will confer immortality upon them. But of "the burial and resurrection of the Lord, the Mediator and Saviour, burial in a rock tomb and resurrection from that tomb," we find not a word said even in the ancient Persian writings. As we have *no* Mithraic Scriptures that can be consulted, the information which Mr. Robertson gives us on this important subject cannot be derived from any authority of greater weight than his own fancy. In works of fiction this gift would be invaluable, but even in the twentieth century we really need something more reliable than this in support of asserted facts. It is perhaps strange that we do not find mention of Mithra's return to the "rock" or cloud whence he, as Sun-god, sprang. Why should not the Sun's setting be commemorated as well as his rising? But the fact remains.

With regard to our Lord, it is somewhat too late in the day to endeavour to revive the exploded theory that He never existed, but was merely a personification of the Sun. Archbishop Whately's *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte*, though written to confute Hume, would equally reduce this Solar myth hypothesis to the absurd. On this point we need say nothing further.

The religion of Mithra which deified the Cæsars, permitted its professors to fraternise with the worshippers of Anaïtis, Cybele, Jupiter, and Baal, and

to adore these and other deities, bathed its devotees in bull's blood, and feigned, if it did not practice, ritual murder at the initiation of its neophytes, cannot by any imaginable process of reasoning be identified with the faith which sternly condemned each and every one of these practices, and whose professors died by the extremity of agonising torture rather than sprinkle a pinch of incense on the fire burning before Cæsar's statue. But the study of Mithraism is valuable because it enables us to see what Christianity *would have been* had it originated in the worship of the Sun. The rise, progress, and downfall of Mithraism shew us also how great is man's felt need of a Saviour, and how utterly insufficient to satisfy it was such a "pagan Christ" as Mithra, who was not incarnated, who neither suffered nor died nor rose again for men, and was held to be the Intermediary between the Spirit of Good and the Spirit of Evil.

THE "INDIAN CHRIST" OF SOME MODERN MYTHOLOGISTS

IN all ages and in every land universal experience has convinced men of the truth of the saying of the ancient Arabian sage, "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." Not only does sorrow fall to men's lot and cause them to shed more tears than would fill the oceans, according to Buddha's genuinely Eastern hyperbole, but death itself awaits them, that "Shadow feared of man," ready to strike them down when they least expect it, certain to do so some day. In varying degrees, too, the consciousness of guilt, the reproach of conscience, the dread of punishment, have ever pursued mankind, in many lands leading even to the sacrifice of one's own children in order to atone for sin. In some savage tribes at the present day, terror of the unseen evil powers which are supposed to surround them is so great that it seems to have swallowed up all loftier ideas of religion. Even in the most highly civilised communities of ancient days the existence of similar beliefs is evidenced by the discovery of numberless charms to avert the evil eye, the extensive use of amulets, and the immense importance attached to all kinds of omens.

Under these circumstances it was but natural that men should seek some means of escape from so many evils. Various methods of attaining this end were devised. But man's consciousness of his own sinfulness and his inability to contend successfully with such mighty invisible foes made him seek elsewhere

for a Deliverer, one who would save him, it might be from death, it might be from sin, or at least from its consequences here and hereafter.

If, as we have the best reason for believing, there still lingered in the world in early ages, and sometimes in much later times, some dim recollection of the Divine Promise of the coming of One who should bruise—or rather crush—the Serpent's head (Gen. iii., 15), it will not seem strange to find among different nations the conception of someone, man or God, who had arisen, or would yet arise, to deliver men from sin and death. Amid his many woes, man would naturally cling to the hope which such a promise would inspire: and he would be led to form some conception of the nature and work of the looked-for Saviour. Those among us who do not accept the Biblical statement that this promise was actually given must at least admit that, even apart from it, such a hope not only *might* spring up in human hearts, but *has* actually manifested itself in a variety of forms in different parts of the world and among nations of various stocks.

So well established is this fact that attempts have actually been made to prove that all our Christian conceptions of the Saviour of mankind are either borrowed from those of the heathen or have originated in exactly the same way. A sufficient answer to this, perhaps, is to point out that we have the *historical Christ*. We have, therefore, no need of theory to account for Him when we have the *fact*. But it is none the less instructive to learn some of the leading ideas that have come into existence among mankind, apart from direct revelation, and to see how in some cases men have evolved ideal saviours from among their gods, and how, in others, they have almost insensibly so coloured their delineations of past or future, real or imaginary, human

beings that we are thus able to understand what kind of a Deliverer men yearned for. In studying the most ancient records which deal with these matters, however, we must be careful to restrain the free play of imagination, in which not a few recent writers on the subject have indulged, and to confine ourselves to the recital of actual facts. Strict adherence to the truth is the only way of learning any lessons which these primæval or even less ancient traditions, myths, or forecasts have to teach us. So studied they are full of interest and instruction. Among other things we may learn from them how low and degraded human ideas often are, and how far short of the Divine reality men's highest hopes have fallen.

One of the ideal "Saviours" who are still adored in India is Kṛishṇa. At the present time in that country an attempt is being made to represent him to the people as an Indian Christ, so to speak. The object of this is to prevent the spread of Christianity by substituting an indigenous deity for a foreign object of worship. A work styled *The Imitation of Kṛishṇa* by its very name shews this only too clearly. Even in England it has recently been asserted that there exists such a marvellous likeness between the story of Kṛishṇa and the Gospel accounts of our Lord's life and work that the Indian god is worthy of being styled a "Pagan Christ." People assure us that the Gospel narrative is largely borrowed from the Indian myth, and that detail after detail of the latter is servilely reproduced in the New Testament and credulously accepted by Christians as a genuine fact of history. Yet it is acknowledged by even writers of the modern mythological school, if we may so term them, that the legends regarding Kṛishṇa which are to be found in circulation in Indian literature are of very late date. No one can tell exactly when these books were composed, but the earliest

of them are at the very least several hundreds of years later than the composition of the Gospels. On this point there is no controversy among scholars. One of the modern mythologists tries to get over this difficulty by saying, "The lateness of the Purānic stories in literary form is no argument against their antiquity" (Mr. Vivian Phelips, *The Churches and Modern Thought*, 2nd ed., p. 137). We leave others to admire the logic here displayed, merely observing that it just as well that we Christians have not to ask people to accept the records of Christ's life upon such a slender foundation. How the first disciples of Christ in Palestine could possibly copy Indian myths ages before they had come into existence, or at least before we have even the very slightest evidence of their having been invented, is a puzzle to the ordinary mind. It requires a great development of the credulity so conspicuous in the writings of our "friends on the other side" to enable anyone to accept such a theory. The difficulty is still further increased when we come to consider the legends about Kṛishṇa actually current among his devotees. For, as we shall see, there is scarcely the faintest resemblance between them and the Gospel narrative. But were the resemblance a thousand times as great as it is, since there is no doubt which of the two accounts is far the earlier, it would be clear to most men that the borrowing, if borrowing there be, must have been from the *earlier* narrative, to wit the Christian, and not conversely.

Another writer—a lady this time—gravely invites us to believe that "The ideal which Jesus Christ held up to His followers is essentially the same as that which Kṛishṇa proposed to Arjuna" in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. "The Gospel (!) of Kṛishṇa and the Gospel of Christ have in fact the same ultimate aim, to open to the human soul a way of escape from the dualism

of matter and spirit in which humanity is at present involved" (*Hibbert Journal*, October, 1907).

We leave it to anyone who has even a very slight acquaintance with the New Testament to judge whether this account of the object of Christ's Gospel is in any imaginable sense correct. Mr. Vivian Phelips tells that Kṛishṇa was "born of a virgin, Devakī": and he assures his credulous readers that, ere Christ was born, "the whole world had already been conversant for ages past with stories of suffering Saviours, *similar in all essentials* to the Gospel narratives" (*op. cit.* p. 161). Whether this be so or not we shall soon see as far as Kṛishṇa is concerned, apart altogether from the lateness of the myth. Some study of the original authorities from which sober students must draw all their information regarding Kṛishṇa—the tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the fifth Book of the *Vishṇu Purāṇa*, the *Harivamsa*, the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Bhagavad Gītā*—compels us with reluctance to come to the conclusion that this gentleman's long account of Kṛishṇa is certainly *not* drawn from these, the only genuine authorities on the subject. Can it be that the modern mythologist is in reality a romancer, appealing to his imagination for his "facts"? Even the totally unreliable Indian myths about Kṛishṇa, comparatively modern though they are, do not support at all adequately many of the statements made by such writers. If a writer on the subject has really lived in India for years, he should at least know the notorious *Prem Sāgar*, the Hindi version of the part of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* which deals with Kṛishṇa. In it we are informed that Devakī, Kṛishṇa's mother, so far from being a virgin at his conception, had already before that borne *seven* children to her husband, Vasudeva (*Prem Sāgar*, chap. iii.). What reliance therefore can be placed upon a writer who

asserts that Kṛishṇa's Virgin-birth is a distinctive feature in the legend?

He proceeds, however, to tell us that "The ancient hymns of the *Rig-Veda* furnish the germs of those Sun-myths which tell of the death, resurrection, and ascension of a Virgin-born Saviour" (*op. cit.*, p. 141). The errors in this sentence are almost as numerous as the words. Whatever else Kṛishṇa may be, he assuredly is not a "sun-myth," any more than he is a "suffering Saviour." His name, which signifies "the Black," probably shews that he was originally a deity worshipped by the aboriginal inhabitants of India, and borrowed from them by their Āryan conquerors. No mention at all of Kṛishṇa is to be found in the *Rig-Veda*. As in few countries is the sun "black," we find some difficulty in believing that he was ever a Sun-god, though a trifle like this does not seriously discourage the credulity of our modern mythologists. We may imagine them saying, "Why should not the sun be black? He is black—during an eclipse." We present them with this argument for all it is worth. It is at least more logical than the doctrine—inculcated by Mr. Vivian Phelips, not by the Hindūs—that Devakī was a virgin after bearing her husband seven children.

The Greek writer Megasthenes tells us that a deity, whom he identifies with Hēraklēs (Hercules), was worshipped near Methora (Mathurā, the present Mattra) in his own time (306–298 B.C.). Possibly this was Kṛishṇa. If so, this is the first mention we find of him anywhere. The *Chandogya Upanishad* (III., § 17, 6) seems to imply that he was a student of philosophy. Upon this Sir Alfred Lyall's (*Asiatic Studies*, R.P.A. reprint, p. 21) suggestion that possibly he was a religious reformer is based. The earlier part of the *Mahābhārata* depicts him as a warrior-king. Kṛishṇa can hardly have played all these

parts, and it is probable that he played none of them. His character and conduct, as depicted for us in the books most prized by his worshippers, often in passages unfit for translation, are best described by saying that they are worthy of the name which he bears, taking its meaning in a moral sense. His exploits are evidently fabulous, but, as related in these books, they consisted mainly in indiscriminate adultery, varied with a good deal of murder. He is said to have had eight specially beautiful wives of his own, besides over 16,000 others, and by them he had a family of 180,000 sons, all of whom finally killed one another, or were murdered by their father. It is a comfort to know that *only* his eight principal wives were burnt alive on his funeral pyre, in accordance with the merciful custom of the Hindūs.

Nowhere but in India, where history and fable are regarded as one and the same thing (*itihāsa*), would all this be deemed historical. But, if it be not so, we have no knowledge of the real Kṛishṇa, if he ever existed. In that famous philosophical poem the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the author of the work has chosen to put his own ideas into Kṛishṇa's mouth, much as if Lucretius had selected Hercules or Bacchus or some other popular deity as his own mouthpiece, or just as people nowadays use Mrs. Partington's name when they wish to perpetrate a mildly silly joke. This is not the place to venture upon an account of the philosophy taught in the poem we have mentioned. Suffice it to say that in it Kṛishṇa, true to his character as a warrior, disguising himself, acts as the hero Arjuna's charioteer, and urges the latter to overcome his great reluctance to shed the blood of his relatives. Kṛishṇa reminds him that one should always perform the duties imposed upon him by his caste. Hence, he argues, since Arjuna belongs to the Kshattriya or warrior caste, he must fight and

kill people (*Bhag. Gītā*, Bks. III., 35; VIII. 7; XI., 33, 34; XVIII., 43, 48). Killing is no murder, he is assured, because of the transmigration of souls (Bk. II., 18–22). Kṛishṇa argues that, in accordance with the eclectic philosophy which he teaches, anyone who is possessed of true knowledge (*Jñāna*) thereby escapes all the evil consequences of sin (Bk. IV., 36, 37). Such teaching lays the axe at the root of the tree of all morality. A modern Hindū writer, well aware that in the Purāṇas Kṛishṇa is the impersonation of almost every vice, thus defends and endeavours to glorify his conduct. "The being," he writes, "who is equal in virtue as well as in vice, is to us a grander being than the extremely virtuous man. . . . Conceive a man who is trying his utmost to fly from vice to its opposite pole, virtue; imagine also a being to whom heat and cold, virtue and vice are the same, and you will find that the latter is *infinitely* superior to the former" (Mulopadhaya, *Imitation of Kṛishṇa*, preface, pp. 2, 3). A cause which requires such reasoning to support it is of course lost. But what are we to think of those who venture to compare Kṛishṇa with Christ, and who tell us that "the Gospel of Kṛishṇa and the Gospel of Christ have, in fact, the same ultimate aim"?

Some tell us that the worshippers of Kṛishṇa hold that devotion to him is the means of salvation, and that this is the same as our Biblical doctrine of Justification by Faith. But this statement is completed by those who first made it by adding that, as no such doctrine of devotion (*bhakti*) is found elsewhere in Hindūism, it must have been borrowed from Christianity. This is, no doubt, possible. Yet a good principle is liable to abuse, and its evil effects will then be in proportion to its original goodness. The results of "devotion" to Kṛishṇa are among the most pernicious conceivable. All who are aware of

the conduct of the so-called Vallabhāchāryas or sect of the "Mahārājās" and their practice of offering "body, mind, and property" (*tan, man, dhan*) to their chiefs, whom they regard as incarnations of Kṛishṇa, will readily admit this. Cases heard before the High Court at Bombay have revealed almost incredible vileness and cruelty thereby produced. Yet Kṛishṇa is the deity most honoured in India to-day.

The fabulous history of Kṛishṇa, as related especially in the *Vishṇu Purāṇa*, is too long to repeat here in detail, but we must give an outline of it. Kañsa, who was an incarnation of the demon Kālanemi, slew the first six of his cousin Devakī's children as soon as they were born. Vishṇu was incarnate in the eighth, Kṛishṇa, who was black. Failing in his attempt to find and kill him too, Kañsa, to whom it had been foretold that the child would ultimately cause his death, imprisoned Kṛishṇa's parents, Vasudeva and Devakī, and ordered the murder of every pious man and every boy of unusual vigour. Besides many improper exploits which are frankly dirty and indecent, Kṛishṇa on one occasion held up the mountain Govardhana on the tip of one of his fingers for seven days to shelter some herdsmen from a storm. He also slew a demon-bull and some serpents of considerable size. Mounted on the wonderful bird Garuḍa, he once went up to the sky to restore her lost ear-rings to the goddess Aditi. On one occasion he hospitably entertained a *ṛishi*. But unfortunately he omitted, through mere inadvertence, to wipe away some fragments of food which had fallen on the holy man's foot. Enraged at this want of respect, the latter declared that his host would be killed by an arrow in the foot. This came to pass through an accident, since a hunter one day mistook the god's foot for a deer and shot his arrow into it. Instead of punishing him, Kṛishṇa sent him up to

the sky in a celestial chariot. Dying of his wound, Kṛishṇa was burnt by Arjuna on a funeral pyre, together with eight of his unfortunate wives. His parents afterwards burnt themselves alive through grief.

This is the legend from which some of our modern sages, with an equal disregard of chronology, probability, history, and common sense, would have us believe that the Gospel narrative is derived!

The fact is that those who invented the myths relating to Kṛishṇa "went upon the analogy of their own experience" in regard to such questions as ethical decency and the lack of moral purpose which is so conspicuous in his character. They never intended him "to be a model, or a reforming ruler and teacher of mankind" (Sir Alfred Lyall, *op. cit.*, pp. 31, 32). In one sense he is considered by his worshippers to be a "Divine Saviour," not, however, one who saves "his people *from* their sins" like our Lord (Matt. i. 21), but one who enables them to live *in* the unchecked perpetration of their cherished sins, which is not quite the same thing. Unfortunately Kṛishṇa has become perhaps the most influential of the deities now worshipped in India, though it has well been said by a man of great experience of these things in that land: "The stories related of Kṛishṇa's life do more than anything else to destroy the morals and corrupt the imagination of the Hindū youth."

THE HISTORICAL BUDDHA AND MODERN MYTHOLOGY

WE have seen that Mithra is the Sun-god and was acknowledged by Mithraists to be such. Krishṇa may or may not have existed as a human being, but certainly had no connection with any Solar myth. A third great Oriental hero, Buddha, was undoubtedly a real man. Attempts to represent him as a Solar myth may be held to have completely broken down since the discovery of the Emperor Ašoka's inscriptions, in one of which Buddha's birthplace is indicated and the date of his birth indirectly given. This inscription, though dating about three hundred years after Buddha's[1] birth, is the earliest extant document on the subject. Contrast this with the well ascertained date of the composition of our Gospels, and the fact that the earliest of St. Paul's Epistles can be proved to have been written within twenty-five years of the Crucifixion. This will enable the reader to judge for himself of the relative reliability of Buddhist and Christian documents. Ašoka's Inscriptions, however, tell us practically nothing of Buddha's history except the fact that he was born in the Lumbinī Grove near Taulīhwā (in Nipāl), apparently about 557 B.C., and died about B.C. 477, and that he uttered certain discourses, none of the names of which correspond with any part of the present Buddhist Canon, whether we take that of the Northern or that of the Southern

[1] Ašoka reigned about 257–220, B.C.

Buddhists. Ašoka in many places, however, caused what we may style the Buddhist[1] creed to be inscribed on rocks, and this agrees with what the Pāli books of the "Three Baskets" (*Tipiṭakam*) give us as the summary of his teaching. There can be no doubt, therefore, what this was, and little uncertainty is now felt that from the Pāli books we can ascertain with fair accuracy the main details of his life and a tolerably correct idea of his character and work. We are able, therefore, to learn what was believed about him at least some few hundred years after his birth, and to distinguish from this the multifarious legends contained in much later books. It is well to point out this in order to prevent an objection that our distinction between the historical and the legendary is arbitrary. There may be something mythical even in what scholars, on the authority of the oldest Buddhist Scriptures, now generally regard as probably correct in the main; but there can be no doubt that what can be proved on documentary evidence to be later additions to the narrative are legendary. Yet some of our modern mythologists do not, as we shall see, scruple to invent and add to them certain mythical details not found even in the latest and most unreliable Buddhist fables. Modern European scholars have written many admirable works on Buddha's life and teaching, and there is, therefore, absolutely no excuse for any writer of the present day who ventures to draw either on his imagination for his statements, or upon such accounts as those given many years ago by St. Hilaire, or again by late Sanskrit, Tibetan, or Chinese books of no authority.

[1] This may be thus translated:—

"Whatever conditions are sprung from a cause,
The cause of them the Tathâgato
Has told, and what is their end:
Thus spake the Great Monk."

We are not surprised that Mr. Blatchford should inform us that the account of our Lord's Virgin-birth was borrowed from Buddhism (*God and My Neighbour:* see my criticism of his statements in the *Clarion* for April 8th, 1904), and that Buddha was a Solar myth. But it is somewhat strange to find such a man as Mr. Vivian Phelips following so innocently in his footsteps. Yet the latter tells us that Buddha was miraculously conceived by his mother Māyā, that "he[1] descended into hell, he ascended into heaven . . . he is to come upon the earth in the latter days to restore the world to order and happiness. He is to be judge of the dead. . . . According to Buddha the motive of all our actions should be pity, or love for our neighbour . . . Finally, we should note that Buddha aimed to establish a 'Kingdom of Heaven' (*Dharmachakra*)." How anyone can venture to palm off the "Kingdom of Heaven" upon us as the translation of a word which means "the wheel of the Law," and connotes the later Buddhist idea that Buddha claimed universal dominion on earth, passes comprehension. But it must be admitted that this last assertion is quite as correct as the others we have quoted in the above extracts.

As his authority for Buddha's miraculous birth, Mr. Phelips mentions[2] Professor Rhys Davids' statement that "Csoma Korösi (*Asiatic Researches*, xx. 299) refers in a distant way to a belief of the later Mongol Buddhists that Māyā was a virgin: but this has not been confirmed." Professor Rhys Davids

[1] *The Churches of Modern Thought*, pp. 124 *sqq.*

[2] His other authorities, he tells us, are Beal's *Romantic History of Buddha*, Bunsen's *Angel Messiah*, and a report mentioned by Jerome (*Contra Jovianum*, Lib. I.). It is almost incredible that he should accept such books as authorities for the existence of the dogma and expect others also to do so.

himself, on the authority of Buddhist works, says that Māyā was "about the forty-fifth year of her age" when "she promised her husband a son" (*Buddhism*, S.P.C.K., 1st ed., p. 26). As she was doubtless married, at latest, when about twelve years old, and had then been living with her husband Suddhodana for some thirty-three years, it is hardly necessary to consider the question of Buddha's "Virgin-birth" any further. Her death occurred seven days after her son was born. All this is neither miraculous nor at all similar to the Gospel narrative.

In my *Noble Eightfold Path*, I have given an Appendix containing the earliest Pāli and Sanskrit accounts of the birth of Buddha (pp. 202–6). It is there shewn that the earliest Pāli books of the Buddhist Canon give absolutely no hint whatever of Māyā's virginity, and mention nothing miraculous in Buddha's conception. In much later Pāli works as for instance in the introduction to the Jātakas, we find a *dream* of Māyā's to the effect that she was carried away to the Himalayas, and that there a great white elephant entered her side. This is related only as a dream, not as a reality, and wise men are called together by her husband to explain what such a singular dream means. They say that the meaning is that her son will be either a great king or an enlightened sage (a "Buddha"). But even here there is no hint of virginity or of a supernatural birth. The first indication of any such idea is found in a Sanskrit poem by Ašvaghosha entitled the *Buddha-Carita* (Bk. I., *vv.* 17, 18). Professor Cowell thinks that this romance may possibly date from the first century of the Christian era. The Professor says, "Whether he (Ašvaghosha) could be the contemporary and spiritual adviser of Kanishka in the first century A.D. is not yet proved, though it appears very probable; but at any rate his *Buddha-*

Carita seems to have been translated into Chinese early in the fifth century. This must imply that it enjoyed a great reputation among the Buddhists of India, and justifies our fixing the date of its composition at least one or two centuries earlier" (Introduction to *Buddha-Carita*, p. v.). Hence we see that *something* marvellous in Buddha's conception was believed by the Indian Buddhists perhaps as early as three hundred years after our Lord's time, possibly even in the first century. But what was it which this flowery poem states on the subject? It boldly accepts as a fact of actual occurrence what the Introduction to the Jātaka fables mentions only as a dream, *viz.* that the future Buddha in the form of an elephant entered his mother's womb. Aśvaghosha seems to indicate his belief in Māyā's virginity also by saying that Suddhodana, "Having gained her, often mastered desire, ever woman's practice, and darkness (*or* anger) then too [he mastered], not at all by night having approached the brilliant moon-plant."

If this is what he means, he very possibly got the idea from Christian accounts of our Lord's birth, for there is no doubt that Christian preachers reached the western coast of India even in Apostolic times. (See Geo. Smith, *The Conversion of India*, pp. 8 and 9.) The idea is certainly completely foreign to earlier Buddhism, which saw nothing marvellous or supernatural in Buddha's conception and birth. Aśvaghosha proceeds to relate many strange things about Buddha, who, he tells us, after being born from Māyā's left side, immediately walked and spoke, proclaiming his own greatness. Later Buddhist works are full of the most absurd tales about his conduct then and afterwards. For instance, the Mahāvaggo informs us that, very shortly after his "enlightenment" under the Bo-tree, Buddha visited

a community of one thousand Jaṭilas, or ascetics with matted locks, near Uruvelâ. He obtained permission to spend the night in the room where they kept their sacred fire burning. There he found "a savage serpent-king of great magical power, a dreadfully venomous serpent," who, angered at his intrusion, "sent forth fire. And the Worshipful One (Buddha), turning his own body into fire, sent forth flames." Having thus overcome the serpent, Buddha next morning threw him into his alms-bowl and exhibited him to the chief of the monks. One night Buddha paid a visit to the Tāvatimsa heaven to pluck a flower. He created five hundred vessels with fire in them for the Jaṭilas to warm themselves at on a winter night when they had bathed. During an inundation, Buddha made the water in one place recede, and then he "walked about in the midst of the water on a dust-covered spot." In all he performed 3,500 miracles, and thereby converted all the Jaṭilas (*Mahāvaggo*, i., 15–20). We mention these as a specimen of the more *sober* marvels attributed to Buddha, in order that the contrast between his miracles and those of our Lord may be clear to everyone.

Some have tried to prove that the *Lalita-Vistara*, a famous Sanskrit romance about Buddha's early life, was in existence shortly after the beginning of the Christian era. These attempts have failed, though we know that such books existed as early as the sixth century after Christ. But, even were it proved that they had existed in much earlier days, how is it possible for any perverse ingenuity to persuade any reasonable human being that the writers of the Gospels could in any way have drawn from such silly tales the marvellous picture of Christ, "Who went about doing good," which we find in the New Testament? It is true that some of the absurdities in the

Apocryphal Gospels may have a Buddhistic origin, as for instance the fable in the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy that our Lord spoke when an infant in the cradle, which story is reproduced in the Qur'ân. But the spirit which produced such compositions is diametrically opposed to that to which our New Testament writings are due. This very fact proves that the latter are not the product of the mythic tendency as are the former. The contrast in tone and character is too complete to permit of the hypothesis that the true and the false have the same origin. John Stuart Mill tells us that the Gospel accounts of Christ's life must be historical, for no poet or dramatist ever lived who could have "imagined the life and character revealed in the Gospels." Professor Harnack, another great thinker, and one whose testimony cannot be suspected of being influenced in favour of orthodox Christianity, in his exhaustive study of early Christian literature, says, "There was a time . . . when people fancied themselves obliged to consider the most ancient Christian literature, inclusive of the New Testament, a mass of deceits and falsifications. That time has passed away. . . . The oldest literature of the Church is in its main points, and in most of its details, treated in a literary-historical way, truthful and reliable" (*Die Chronologie der altchristlichen Litteratur*, Vol. I., pp. viii. and ix.). So that, were the resemblances to be found in Buddhist myths ten times as great as they really are, the conclusions of the opponents of Christianity would still be devoid of any real foundation.

But let us see what is really taught about Buddha in the earliest and most reliable Buddhist works.

His youth was passed in Kapilavastu and its neighbourhood. He resided with Suddhodana, his father, during the winter, summer, and the rainy season each year in one or another of the three country-

seats which a later tradition terms royal "palaces." He married early in accordance with Indian custom. Only one of his wives is mentioned by name, though accounts differ as to what her name was. The *Buddhavamso* represents him as stating that he had 40,000 wives (ch. xxvi, 15), and later accounts double this number, but these may be regarded as grossly exaggerated. The only son of his who is mentioned is Rāhulo, who was born when Buddha—or, as he was then called, Siddhārtha—was twenty-nine years of age. Buddha then deserted his wife and child and became an anchoret, retiring from all the world's fickle joys in order to find peace of mind through self-torture. He became the disciple of one devotee after another, and, dissatisfied with them, almost killed himself by his asceticism. After seven years' vain effort to obtain "the supreme, best state of calm," he saw the futility of this method, and began to take food in strict moderation.

One night he sat meditating near Uruvelā under a sacred tree, the *pīpal*, since known as the "Bo-tree." His abstraction became intense, and he finally imagined that he had reached Omniscience (*sambodhi*) and had discovered the cause and cure of all human suffering. He then said of himself, "I have overcome all foes; I am all-wise; I am free from stains in every way; I have left everything, and have obtained emancipation through the destruction of desire. Having myself gained Knowledge, whom should I call my master? I have no teacher: no one is equal to me; in the world of men and of Gods no being is like me. . . . I am the highest teacher. I alone am the absolute omniscient one (*sambuddho*): I have gained coolness" (by the extinction of all passions), "and have obtained Nirvāṇa. To found the kingdom of the law (*dhammo*) I go to the city of the Kāsīs (Banāras): I will beat the drum of immortality

in the darkness of this world." By "immortality" (*amata*) he meant Nirvāṇa. It is called deathlessness because, as there is no existence in it, there can be no dying. It differs therefore *in toto* from what we mean by immortality.

Buddha was so far from claiming to be a Divine Incarnation that he never in any way even acknowledged the existence of a Creator of the universe. He spoke of the *devas* or gods of popular belief as needing to accept his philosophy in order to escape from the misery of existence.

As soon as he had evolved his philosophy, he desired to teach it to others. Later accounts tell us that "Māro" endeavoured to persuade and even to frighten him into becoming annihilated (entering Nirvāṇa) at once, so as to prevent him from passing on to others the secret of escape from the misery of existence. Māro caused all kinds of terrible convulsions in Nature in order to alarm Buddha, but in vain. "A thousand appalling meteors fell; clouds and darkness prevailed. Even this earth, with the oceans and mountains it contains, though it is unconscious, quaked like a conscious being—like a fond bride when forcibly torn from her bridegroom—like the festoons of a vine shaking under the blasts of a whirlwind. The ocean rose under the vibration of this earthquake; rivers flowed back towards their sources; peaks of lofty mountains, where countless trees had grown for ages, rolled crumbling to the earth; a fierce storm howled all around; the roar of the concussion became terrific; the very sun enveloped itself in awful darkness, and a host of headless spirits filled the air" (Prof. Rhys Davids' *Buddhism*, S.P.C.K., pp. 36, 37). Some people have compared this fancy sketch with the Gospel account of the Temptation of our Lord. Suffice it to say that Māro is not Satan, as the latter has no place in Buddhism, that the object

a = annihilation.

of the trial was quite different in the two cases, and that the details bear no resemblance to one another.

Buddha's whole system of philosophy differed widely from the doctrines of Christianity. "His object was to get rid of an existence without God and without hope," which he felt to be all the more terrible because he held that the death of the body does not end the consequences of one's conduct here. He believed that life was devoid of all purpose. All its happiness seemed to him worse than illusory, but "all that causes suffering—birth, sickness, death, separation from what is dear to us, and union with what is hateful"—remained. "And this stream of misery and tears extends backwards to all eternity . . . and stretches forward to all the eternities. This is what is implied in the ceaseless passing of all beings . . . into life, until they die, and again from death, by means of repeated births, into a new existence full of suffering" (Prof. Grau, *The Goal of the Human Race*, pp. 145–7).

He spent the rest of his life after attaining Buddhahood in travelling about the country, teaching his gloomy philosophy. Many disciples, thousands of them, joined him, principally from the titled and wealthy to whom he almost exclusively addressed himself. At length, at the age of eighty years, he died through some error of diet, and then, in the opinion of himself and his followers, became extinct. His last words addressed to the monks who formed his *Sangho* or Community were these: "Come now, mendicants, I bid you farewell. Compounds are subject to dissolution. Succeed through diligence" *(Mahāparinibbāna-Suttam*, p. 61.)

He taught the doctrine of transmigration of character and the results of conduct (*Karma*), and also the non-existence of the human soul. According

to him, the motive for all conduct should be the attainment of Nirvāṇa, and thus of release from all "passions," good or bad, and ultimate extinction.

The idea that "he is to be judge of the dead," that "he descended into hell, he ascended into heaven, he is to come upon the earth in the latter days to restore the world to order and happiness," is absolutely contrary to Buddhism, and is due either to an unaccountable mistake or to the romantic imagination of a modern English mythologist. Buddhists, who believe that before their teacher's birth there were many other Buddhas, look for the coming of still more, and especially for one who is to be called Metteyo. But they are bound to believe that the historical Siddhārtha or Gotamo Buddha is extinct, and certainly, therefore, cannot expect his return to earth.

THE MYTH OF ADONIS, ATTIS, AND OSIRIS

ALL classical scholars are aware of the existence of an ancient myth, which, in slightly different forms, once prevailed throughout Western Asia, Egypt, Italy and Greece, and which in general set forth in parabolical language the death of vegetation in winter and its coming to life again in spring. In the Hellenic world and in Italy people told how the Ruler of Hades, or Orcus, carried off to the realms below Persephone or Proserpina, the fair daughter of the Earth- or Corn-goddess, Demeter or Ceres, and how she was allowed periodically to return to the surface again and spend some time with her mother, ere going back once more to the domain of the dead. In Egypt we have the myth of Osiris, in Mesopotamia and Syria that of Adonis, in Phrygia that of Attis (also called Atys or Attin). A slightly varied Phrygian fable styles the demigod Agdistis.

It has occurred to the fertile imaginations of certain modern writers that perhaps they could successfully practise upon the credulity and ignorance of "the man in the street," and so induce him to believe that the doctrine of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ was but another form of this ancient Nature-legend. Of course, all who have studied the evidence for our Lord's Resurrection know that this evidence is quite unanswerable. Strauss, Rénan and countless other opponents, in modern as well as in early Christian times, have endeavoured to explain away

the recorded facts of the case, and always in vain. It has not been necessary for Christians to answer these attacks, for one assailant has overthrown another and shewn how hopeless his theory was. Professor Orr's recent book on the subject (*The Resurrection of Jesus*) carefully weighs each hostile theory and concisely gives the evidence which opponents have, during eighteen hundred years, entirely failed to shake, or even to account for unless by confessing it to be true. It is not our intention to deal with the proof of the doctrine of Christ's Resurrection at present, but rather to examine the narratives relating to Adonis, Attis, and Osiris, in order to see whether these various forms of the Nature-myth really bear such a striking resemblance to the Gospel history as has been loudly asserted of late.

The name "Adonis" is really due to an error of the Greeks. Hearing the Oriental women "weeping for Tammuz" and lamenting aloud, as at the interment of a king, "Adōnī" ("My lord": cf. the Hebrew of Jer. xxii. 18, and xxxiv. 5, also Ezek. viii. 14), they fancied that this, instead of being a title, was the name of the deceased. But his real name was Tammuz in Hebrew and Syriac, and was derived from the Accadian *Dumu-zi*, "Son of Life," probably a contraction for *Dumu-zi-apsu*, "Son of the Life (Spirit) of the Deep" (Sayce). Tammuz was regarded as the offspring of Ea, the god of the ocean. Another of his sons was Asari, whose worship was carried to Egypt by its early Semitic conquerors. This latter deity became known in Greek as Osiris. Both Tammuz and he were originally Sungods, though afterwards in some measure identified with the fruits of the earth. It is not at all strange, therefore, to find that at a later time in Phœnicia, Osiris and Tammuz were in a measure

confounded with one another, and their myths in some degree held to be but varied forms of one and the same legend or allegory.

The Greek form of the tale of Adonis is well known, and it has been frequently the theme of poetry in many tongues. He was the lover of the goddess Aphrodite, he was slain by the tusk of a wild boar, and the goddess lamented him yearly, and caused a flower to spring from his blood (cf. *Ovid*, "Metamorphoses," Lib. x., 503-fin.). Another form of the story informs us that Adonis was son of an Assyrian king Theias and his own daughter Smyrna, and that, when the child was born, Aphrodite handed him over to Persephone to be reared. When Aphrodite thought that the time had come for him to return to her, Persephone refused to restore him. Zeus was then appealed to, and asked to decide with whom Adonis should dwell. He decreed that a third part of each year should be spent with each of the rival goddesses in turn, the remaining third being at Adonis' own disposal. Adonis, however, devoted this period also to Aphrodite. He was afterwards killed by a boar while hunting, as has already been mentioned (Apollodorus, Lib. iii., cap. 14, § 3-4). This writer tells us nothing whatever of Adonis' return to life, though it may perhaps be inferred that something of the kind was implied by the alternate visits to Aphrodite and to the Queen of Hades. But, if so, these occurred rather before than after his death. In the previous version of the myth, the nearest approach to a return to life is the growth of a flower from his blood.

If we may judge from the classical forms of the legend, lamentation for the death of Adonis long preceded the establishment of any festival in honour of his return to the bosom of Aphrodite. But in much later times in Rome and elsewhere the festival of the "Adonia" was celebrated in June, at the time

of the summer solstice, with alternate wailings and rejoicings. According to Macrobius (*Saturn.* i., 21, *vide* Sayce, *Religions of Egypt and Assyria*, and *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 231), the Syrians explained the boar's tusk, with which Adonis was slain, as denoting the cold and gloom of winter, and said that his return to earth implied his "victory over the first six zodiacal signs, along with the lengthening daylight." The reference to the signs of the zodiac shews that Adonis was still known to have originally been the Sungod, though then identified with the fertility of the soil, which was regarded as largely due to his generative influence. Professor Sayce holds that the Syrian custom of rejoicing immediately after the "wailing for Tammuz" was introduced from Egypt, where the idea of Osiris' continued life after death had long been entertained. Lucian's account of the Syrian festival supports this supposition (*De Syria Dea*, cap. vii.). From very ancient times, as we learn from the Assyrian poem of the "Descent of Ishtar to Hades," it was believed in Accad that Ishtar, or Ashtoreth, who in Greece was styled Aphrodite, had gone down to the lower world "in search of the healing waters which should restore to life her bridegroom, Tammuz." Apparently she succeeded, but the poem says absolutely nothing of any return to life on the part of the dead god. (See the original text in Rawlinson's *Inscriptions of Western Asia*, vol. iv., plate 31.)

The "wailing for Tammuz" took place in different countries at different seasons of the year. Accad and Babylonia generally recognised the fierce summer heat as his deadly foe, Phœnicia the cold of winter. "If there was another feast in which grief gave place to joy at his restoration to life, it was separate from that which celebrated his death, and must have taken place at a different time of the year." In the West, on the other hand, "he ceased to

be the Sungod of spring and became the Sungod of summer. Winter, and not summer, was the enemy who had slain the god" (Sayce, *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 231, 232). Hence, when Julian the Apostate entered Antioch in triumph in October, A.D. 362, the wailing over Adonis' death which he then found going on must have seemed to him full of ill omen (Am. Marcellinus, Lib., xxii., 9., 15).

The fact that this lamentation for Tammuz was observed at different seasons of the year in different countries, in accordance with the known variety of their climate, agrees with all other facts of the case, and proves that his worshippers did not fall into the error of imagining that they were weeping for a human "Saviour" or Deliverer who had been slain. They by no means regarded Tammuz as a Saviour, but well understood that their religious rites had reference to an annual occurrence in Nature. That this was recognised is clear from the explanations of it which Roman and Greek authors give on their authority, and also from the loathsomely licentious practices then observed in honour of the god. "It is possible, though not yet proved, that in Tammuz two deities have been combined together, the Sungod and the vegetation of the spring which the young Sun of the year brings into existence" (Sayce, *Religions of Egypt and Babylonia*, p. 350). The same process of combination or of reflection was pursued in the case of Osiris also, as we shall see presently. Ultimately, as Marcellinus shews (Lib. xix., 1., 11, and Lib. xxii., 9., 15), it was held that the reaping of the corn and the dying down of vegetation at the onset of winter was what was really denoted by Tammuz' death. Thus the god became identified not so much with vegetation itself as with the productive or generative power in Nature which caused the crops to grow out of the bosom of the earth. As the

character of Tammuz, her "lover," underwent this change, so Ishtar herself came to express a conception altogether different from that which she at first represented. She was originally "the spirit of the evening star" (Sayce, *op. cit.*, p. 340), as we learn from her name, which, in its primary Accadian form Giš-dar, meant "bright lady." (It occurs so written in the Preface to Ḫammurabi's Laws, column iii., line 54, in Harper's edition of the original text.) But when Adonis became the vivifying power which produces vegetation, Ishtar was regarded as the Earth fertilised thereby, very much as was the case with Isis in Egypt.

It is impossible for us to describe the abominably immoral practices which resulted from this conception, and which were everywhere inseparably connected with the worship of Adonis and Aphrodite, otherwise styled Tammuz and Ishtar. Not only at Babylon in the temple of the goddess whom Herodotus (Lib. i., 199) terms Mylitta, but also wherever the productive powers of Nature were deified—in Phrygia, in Cyprus, throughout heathen Palestine, in Syria, in India, and in many other lands—these abominations were for ages continued as religious rites. They were supposed to give pleasure to the deities in whose honour they were practised, to promote the fertility of the soil, and to acquire merit for the unspeakably degraded beings who practised them.

Lucian, or the author of the book *On the Syrian Goddess* generally ascribed to him, after giving us an account of the shameful rite performed at Byblos (Gebal) in honour of Aphrodite each year, tells us that, *the very day after* that on which the lamentation for Adonis' death took place, an announcement was made that he was alive (*De Syria Dea*, cap. 6). This is one of the comparatively few instances in which any distinct mention is found of the belief

that he did return to life, except, indeed, in the pages of *Christian* writers of antiquity. The latter not unfrequently apply distinctively Christian phraseology to heathen ideas, by the use, for example, of such words as "resurrection." Dr. Frazer, perhaps unconsciously, somewhat colours the picture he draws, partly because the English language itself has become permeated with Christian conceptions. Mr: Robertson continues the process in a manner which candour and the desire to represent the actual facts hardly warrant. Then Mr: Vivian Phelips takes things in hand, and unfortunately allows his imagination to carry him entirely away.

To give an instance of this with reference to the myth of Adonis, let us take what Lucian and Theocritus tell us about the latter deity's return to life. The author of the little book *On the Syrian Goddess*, already quoted, says regarding Adonis: "Afterwards, on the next day, they say mythically that he is alive, and send him into the air" (cap. vi.). Dr. Frazer paraphrases this by saying, "Adonis was supposed to come to life next day, and *ascend to heaven.* This probably occurred in spring, *about Easter.*" (The italics are ours.) Again he tells us, on Theocritus' authority, that at Alexandria "the women wailing for Adonis sang that he would return" (*Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, pp. 182–6). What, according to Theocritus, they really said was, "Farewell now, dear Adonis, and mayest thou be of good cheer till next year. And now thou art gone, Adonis, and as a friend shalt thou come when thou arrivest" (Theoc., xv., 143–4).

Mr. Vivian Phelips on such authority founds his amazing statement that, "Of all old-world legends, the death and resurrection of a . . . divinely-born Saviour was the most widespread" (*The Churches*

and Modern Thought, p. 59). This assertion is hardly justified by the facts of the case, at least as far as the myth of Adonis is concerned. Whether it is in harmony with what we learn from other somewhat similar stories we shall be able to judge when we have carried a little further this present chapter.

We now turn to the study of the Phrygian legend of Attis. Some of the details of this story are well known to us from classical sources, on which, in the absence of genuine Phrygian accounts, we have to depend; others are unfit for repetition in a modern language. Attis was, the tale relates, though in other words, son[1] of a savage monster called Agdistis and a princess Nana. Agdistis was the offspring of Jupiter and a huge rock. Dr. Frazer points out that in reality Agdistis is "a double of Attis" (*Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, p. 224). We dare not sully our pages by narrating the details given regarding Agdistis' conception, but it is emphatically not a Virgin-birth. As Agdistis and Attis are practically one and the same being, what is true of Agdistis' birth applies equally to that of Attis. The people who told these tales certainly did not mean to imply that they believed in the Virgin-birth of either of these deities. Dr. Frazer is probably right

[1] Arnobius (Adv. Gentes, Lib. v.) narrat Agdistem per Bacchi dolum sese partibus privasse genitalibus. "Cum discidio partium sanguis fluit immensus. Rapiuntur et combibuntur haec terra. Malum repente cum pomis *ex his* punicum nascitur, cuius Nana speciem contemplata, regis Sangarii vel fluminis filia, carpit mirans atque in sinu reponit. Fit ex eo praegnans." Dr. Frazer, though he refers to this story, says, "His mother Nana was a virgin, who conceived by putting a ripe almond or a pomegranate into her bosom" (*Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, p. 219). It is pretty clear, to those who know anything of the East, what the figurative meaning of the almond or pomegranate really is; and the particulars which Arnobius gives of the origin of the latter makes the meaning still plainer. Hence it is hardly quite correct to say that here we have what is intended to be an instance of belief in a Virgin-birth, in the true sense of the term.

in holding that the name which in Greek assumed the form "Attis" is the word which in all Turko-Tartar languages, including Accadian and Hungarian, means "Father," while Nana in languages of the same stock denotes "Mother." The "rock" probably signifies a cloud or the sky, as in the case of Mithra (see p. 19 above). Thus in its original form the myth was a Nature-legend, entirely free from the unsavoury features into which later mythologists distorted the primitive account of the fertilising of the earth by the heaven-sent rain.

Attis is distinctly at once a Sungod and god of fertility. The story of his association with the "Great Mother," Cybele, and of his self-mutilation, is differently told by different writers, but the general meaning is the same.

According to Arnobius, Agdistis entreated Zeus to restore Attis to life. He *refused* to do so; yet he granted that the body should remain undecayed, that his hair should keep growing, and "his smallest finger always moving." We find that the Sungod is somehow identified at once with the generative power of Nature and with the corn which is sown in the earth and springs forth from it. The growth of Attis' hair after his death recalls the story, alike Chinese and old Norse, which relates how the flesh of Pw'ân-Ku or Ymir became the soil (as did that of Tiâmat in Babylonian mythology), and his hairs the plants of the earth. But, instead of a literal "resurrection" of Attis, we are told that permission to rise again was refused, and that his resuscitation *did not* take place. If other accounts import into the story the idea that Attis returned to life, it is clear that the meaning is the same as in the case of Adonis. To speak of the "resurrection" of Attis, therefore, as being celebrated on the 25th March, during the observance of the *Hilaria* festival at Rome

in honour of Cybele, hardly seems quite in accordance with the real belief of Attis' devotees. Livy speaks of Cybele's festival as occurring "on the day before the Ides of April," i.e. on the 12th April. The general character of the worship offered to Attis, and the way in which the most devout of his adorers, the Galli, mutilated themselves in imitation of their deity, is well known. The main features of the myth of Attis bear such a close resemblance to those of the Adonis legend that we need not further dwell upon them. It remains for us to enquire into the Egyptian story of Osiris.

The *Book of the Dead*, as European writers, following Lepsius, generally style the volume so often interred by the ancient Egyptians in the tombs along with the bodies of their deceased friends and relatives, confirms the account long known to us from the Greek writer Plutarch (*De Iride et Osiride*, capp. 13–21). It assumes as a well-known fact that Osiris "suffered death and mutilation at the hands of his enemies; that the various members of his body were scattered about the land of Egypt; that his sister-wife Isis sought him sorrowing and at length found him; that she raised up his body and was united unto him; that she conceived and brought forth a child (Horus); and that Osiris became the god and king of the Underworld" (Budge, *Book of the Dead*, Introd. to Translation, p. lxxx.). It was believed that when the pieces of his body (except one, which a fish had swallowed) were collected and put together they were made into a mummy, and thus preserved in the tomb from decay (*vide* the Egyptian text, cap. cliv., line 16, Budge's Ed.).

In this book it is clear that Osiris is identified with the setting sun, as in the Hymn to Osiris, in Chapter XV., for instance. That passage thus addresses him, "Thou turnest thy face to Amentet" (the

Underworld); "thou makest both lands to shine with refined copper. The dead stand beholding thee, they draw breath, they behold thy face as the rising of the solar disc from its horizon; their hearts rest in beholding thee: thou art everlastingness, eternity." At the beginning of this Hymn he is styled, *Un nefer*, "the Good Being," and the "Lord of Eternity," and his worshippers must, therefore, originally have conceived of him as a god possessed of very lofty attributes, though in later times this idea became very much debased, as in similar cases in all other Ethnic faiths. At Ōn (Heliopolis), Osiris was adored as "the Soul of Rā," the Sungod (Pinches, *Old Test. in the Light of*, etc, p. 264).

It is customary among modern writers to speak of Osiris' "Resurrection." This is a mistake which may produce serious consequences. What we learn from the *Book of the Dead* is that his body was carefully put together and buried, and that he became god of the Underworld, where be bestows eternal existence upon those who become in a mystical manner identified with him. It is because his body was held to be dead, buried, and to remain lifeless, that the title of god of the "still heart" was bestowed on Osiris, since stillness of the heart implies death. In this respect he was held to be in the same condition as mummified men, being alive only in spirit, not in body. This is clear from almost every reference to him in Egyptian theology. Accordingly in one passage Thoth is represented as addressing him thus: "Thy son Horus avengeth thee, . . . he bindeth together for thee thy flesh, he gathereth together for thee thy limbs, he collecteth for thee thy bones. . . . Thou art lifted up, then, Osiris; I have given thee thy hand: I cause thee to remain alive for ever. . . . The great company of the gods protecteth thee, . . . they journey beside thee to the door of the gate of the

Underworld (*Ṭuat*)" (*Book of the Dead*, Egyptian text, p. 47, lines 4–6). He is spoken of as "giving birth to mortals a second time," as well as himself "coming to youth" again (*op. cit.*, p. 482). Dr. Budge explains the former expression as referring to "the birth into the life which is beyond the grave" (Introd., p. lxxxv.). It certainly does not imply a belief in the Christian doctrine of the New Birth, or in a resurrection of the body of Osiris himself, or of his devotees. "The educated Egyptian," says Dr. Budge, "never believed that the material body would rise again and take up new life. . . . They mummified their dead, simply because they believed that spiritual bodies would 'germinate' in them. . . . The dead body of Osiris himself rested upon earth in Heliopolis" (Introd., p. lxxxvi.). On this point the language of the *Book of the Dead* is clear: "Ta χat nutert āāt enti ḥeteptu em Ánnu," that is to say, "The divine great body, which is laid at rest in Heliopolis" (Eg. text, cap. 162, line 7: cf. Plutarch, *op. cit.*, cap. 20, *fin.*).

We are not told anything of the nature of the spiritual body with which Osiris entered the Lower World. But "that he dwelt in the material body which was his upon earth, there is no reason whatever to suppose" (Budge, *ut supra*). His dismembered body was collected and preserved from decay, for the same reason as that which led to the preservation of the bodies of those Egyptians who could afford to be properly embalmed. The Egyptian authorities on the subject shew us that it would be just as correct to say that the mummies in our museums had "risen from the dead," as to speak of the "Resurrection" of Osiris. He was believed to be alive, and to reign in the Underworld, just as their *spirits* were recognised as living, in spite of the fact that their mummified bodies remained dead. In the

Christian sense of the word, Osiris' followers did not at all believe that he had "risen from the dead," though they thought that in the Underworld he could render very real assistance to the spirits of those who had served him on earth. In this respect Osiris in Egypt was supposed to perform the same office as was undertaken in Babylonian mythology by Merodach (Marduk). On Cyrus' "Barrel Cylinder," for example, Merodach is referred to as "The lord who by his might quickeneth the dead" ("Belu ša ina tukulti-ša [?-šu] uballitu mitūtān": Rawlinson, *Cun. Inscr. of Western Asia*, vol. v., plate 35, line 19), that is to say, gives life to their spirits by introducing them into the realm of the departed, and there watching over them. It is of great importance that the true significance of such phrases should be rightly understood. The context enables us to ascertain what the real meaning of such language is, and how it was understood by the worshippers of Osiris in the one country and of Merodach in the other.

We must now consider the meaning of the myth of Osiris. In name, and originally in the idea which he represented, Osiris (in Egyptian *Ásar*) is identical with the Sumerian god Asari. The latter was, like Osiris, god of the setting sun (Sayce, *Religions*, etc., p. 164), and was by the Semitic conquerors of the country identified with Merodach. The spirit of the pious Egyptian, when "justified" and identified with Osiris, prays that it may come forth with Rā, the Sungod, into the sky, and with him sail over the world in the Ātetet boat of the sun (*Papyrus of Ani*, sheet 20, Hymn to Rā, line 5). Hence it is clear that the death of Osiris meant the setting of the Sun: and the red glow of sunset shed over the land was possibly what the myth allegorically expressed by speaking of the parts of his body being scattered over the whole country after his murder by his brother

Typhon or Set. Or in Egypt there may have prevailed at one time, as was undoubtedly the case in very many other countries, the barbarous custom of killing a man and sprinkling his blood and scattering far and wide over the fields the torn fragments of his body in order to secure their fertility (*Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, pp. 330-1). If so, the red and scattered rays of the setting sun may have been at first allegorically compared to a death and mutilation of this kind, and this may have been afterwards taken for a literal reality. This, of course, is only a supposition, and cannot be proved. But, if taken only as a hypothesis, it gives a possible explanation of the strange and ghastly story. In some way or other it is certain that, though Osiris was at first the setting Sun, who was entreated to enlighten with his rays those whose spirits after death travelled with him to his resting-place in the distant West, and to secure them new life in the dark Underworld, yet he ultimately became identified with the fertility of the ground and the growth of corn (Frazer, *op. cit.*, p. 323; Plutarch, *op. cit.*, capp. 32, 33, 36, 38, 51, 65). Sayce shews that it is incorrect to take Osiris as originally denoting the sown corn, though later the identification did take place (*Rel. of Ancient Eg. and Bab.*, p. 167). He was also associated with the Nile, if not actually identified therewith, because the Nile gives fertility and as it were life itself to the land by its annual overflow. But Mr. Grant Allen is quite in error in fancying that Osiris was an Egyptian chief or king, deified after death. In this he is unconsciously following in the footsteps of Euhemeros, and saying of Osiris what was asserted of Zeus in Crete. Euhemerism (or "Humanism") is quite untenable as a theory employed to explain such myths as those we are now dealing with. Osiris was not a "suffering Saviour" in the sense of having

ever been a man, or having in any way died for men. Such a theory has no support among Egyptologists.

The sowing of the seed corn was compared with the burial of the dead and with the setting of the sun; and so it was not unnatural that the Egyptians should consider the sunrise and the springing up of the grain as typical of the life of the spirit after its separation from the body. At least as early as the Eighteenth Dynasty, Osiris was supposed to be closely connected with the corn as it emerged into new life, though we have seen that this was not the original idea represented by the god. But here we must guard against a misunderstanding into which Dr. Frazer has somehow been led. He says, "Thus from the sprouting of the grain the ancient Eyptians drew an augury of human immortality. They are not the only people who have built the same far-reaching hopes on the same slender foundation." He then proceeds to quote St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians xv., 36–38, 42–44 (*op. cit.*, p. 345). It is clear that he would have us understand that the Apostle founds the Christian hope of immortality upon the fact that the grain, when properly sown, springs up fresh and vigorous. If this were so, the foundation would be slender indeed. But had the learned author whom we have quoted taken the trouble to read St. Paul's argument carefully before criticising it, he would have seen that the Apostle *does not* teach anything whatever of the kind. On the contrary, he teaches that our hope of rising again from the dead is based (not on the sprouting of corn but) on the historical fact of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. xv., 1–24). This fact he knew for a certainty, and so did the Corinthian Christians. Even a casual reader may see that St. Paul uses the growth of the corn only as an *illustration*. Professor Sayce well points out that in Egypt,

too, no one fancied that the immortality of the soul was *proved* by the fact that the buried seed afterwards sprang up into new life. Among the worshippers of Osiris as among Christians the illustration drawn from the corn was "the result of the doctrine of the Resurrection, not the origin of it. It is not till men believe that the human body can rise again from the sleep of corruption that the growth of the seed which has been buried in the ground is invoked to explain and confirm their creed" (*Rel. of Eg. and Bab.*, p. 167). Probably the Egyptians did not believe in the actual resurrection of the body, but from the most ancient times they, in common with all other nations, held firmly the conviction that the death of the human body did not end all, but that the spirit lived on in another sphere. This is not the place to discuss the origin and grounds of such a belief, but it clearly did not rest on such a slender foundation as Dr. Frazer fancies. Nor does the Christian.

It is not quite clear how and why Osiris finally came to appear to the Egyptians to have more in common with humanity than the other gods. Probably this was due to his dying and yet in a sense remaining alive, as the sun manifestly seemed to do, in which fact he resembled men, whom death could not and did not completely destroy. All the Egyptian gods and goddesses were thought to possess material bodies, upon which old age at least had a very considerable influence for the worse. Hence it was not difficult to conceive of one of them being murdered, as the myth related in reference to Osiris. They believed that this had taken place at the time when the gods reigned on earth. Osiris was in this sense, and only in this sense, regarded as having been an Egyptian sovereign, who had been treacherously slain, and whose tomb could still be pointed out at Heliopolis, just as could that of Zeus in Crete.

(For an answer to Mr. Grant Allen's deductions from this latter statement of Euhemeros, see my *Comparative Religion*.[1])

In consequence of his having died and yet remaining spiritually alive, Osiris seemed to his worshippers to be a real deliverer, at least in the sense that they thought that he felt for dying men more perhaps than any other god, and could therefore be entreated to take pity on their souls and protect them from the multitudinous dangers that beset the soul on its long journey to the *Sekhetu Áalu* or Elysian Fields. But, as we have seen, they did not for one moment imagine that his body had ever come to life again. The doctrine of the "Resurrection of Osiris" must therefore be regarded as due to the reading of Christian teaching and belief into heathen expressions of quite a different meaning. This being the case, it is manifestly impossible to agree with our modern Mythologists in seeking to deduce the doctrine of the Resurrection of our Lord from the Osiris-myth. inasmuch as the latter contained no such doctrine. But from the pathetic way in which the Egyptians turned to Osiris in their grief, in the presence of death and the unknown future, we may learn how deep and heartfelt was man's need of a Saviour from death and from sin.

Although it thus contained some measure of truth, the Osiris-myth led in practice to the same degradation of morals which we find encouraged by other Nature-myths. Dr. Frazer reminds us that, at the time when the Dendera inscription was composed, Osiris had come to be regarded "as a personification of the corn which springs from the fields after they have been fertilised by the inundation. This, according to the inscription, was the kernel of the mysteries"

[1] Longmans & Co., 1/-.

(*op. cit.*, p. 323). As Osiris therefore, especially when regarded (as Professor Maspero shews he was from very ancient times) as the fertilising power of the Nile which produced the corn, conveyed to the mind of his worshippers the idea of generative might, it is not strange that this conception led to evil. Both Herodotus (ii., 48, etc.) and Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiride*, capp. 18, 36, 51) tell us how closely his worship at last became associated with phallic rites and indecent orgies. Upon this matter we cannot dwell, for obvious reasons. But the fact, which is undisputed, shews us that, in spite of the "Negative Confession" in the *Book of the Dead* (cap. cxxv.), Osirianism cannot be correctly regarded as inculcating moral purity. In this respect it resembled all other religions which are in any way associated with Nature-worship. This is the reason why almost all clearly and fully developed forms of Ethnic religion among civilised nations have produced such vile enormities. The central points of religious thought among the mass of men in heathen lands have always been the mysteries of birth, marriage and death, as Albrecht Dieterich has well pointed out. Each man is deeply concerned to answer the questions, "Whence do I come, and whither do I go?" These mysteries are closely associated with his deepest passions, and in them and their results, full of marvels as they are, he seems to himself most clearly to recognise the workings of the Incomprehensible, the Divine. "Being begotten and dying are the mystery of man's beginning and of his end: the procreative power and impulse constitute the marvel of his person and life, horror of death is the only dread which even the strong man cannot wholly banish, the enigmatic, the most awful thing which 'deadly' foes can do to the living. . . . Among many peoples . . . the Earth is considered the Mother of Mankind, from

which the children of men issue forth to earthly birth. . . . The belief is widespread also that the soul of the dying man returns to the earth" (A. Dieterich, *Mutter Erde*). Man sees procreation and birth in the sowing of seed in the earth and in the consequent growth of plants. In most countries this thought was developed in such a way that the Sky was considered to be the husband and the Earth the wife; hence in Greek mythology the gods themselves sprang from Ouranos and Gaia—Heaven and Earth (Hesiod, "Theogonia," v. 45), just as they did in Polynesia from Rangi and Papa. But in Egypt the process was reversed, probably because the fertilising and procreative rain does not there, as elsewhere, fall from the sky, but the moisture rises instead from the cornfields flooded by the Nile. So the sky (*Nūt*) in Egypt was the Mother, Earth (*Seb*) the Father. The procreative idea, however, was the same, and, associated with Osiris as the giver of new life and as at once brother and husband of Isis, it produced its usual effects in the degradation alike of religion and of morals. The thought of Osiris and Isis as brother and sister may have at first been innocent, but, like the similar tale of incest between Zeus and Hēra in Hellenic mythology, it soon tended to lower the moral tone, all the more so when it came to be forgotten what these deities had primarily represented.

From the legend of Osiris we may, no doubt, learn how firmly men clung, in Egypt as well as elsewhere, to their primæval belief in an after-life, and how they yearned for a Deliverer from the terrors of death and the grave. They felt the need for a God who, by his own experience knowing something of human suffering and death, could feel sympathy for men, and would associate them with himself in the world of spirits in the life beyond the tomb. "In the fulness of time" the true God was to

grant them the fulfilment of all their hopes, the realisation of the deepest longings of their hearts. Christ, "the Man Christ Jesus," came to carry our sorrows as well as to bear our sins, to die a literal death of agony, and by rising from the dead evince "by many infallible proofs" the truth of His claims, the certainty of our triumph over death in Him, and the fact that God had been leading men to the light and not deceiving them as by a will-o'-the-wisp to their ruin through the instinctive belief He had given them in a life to come.

Our examination of the myths of Adonis, Attis, and Osiris leads to the conclusion that under these names "the peoples of Egypt and Western Asia represented the yearly decay and renewal of life, especially of vegetable life, which they personified as a god who annually died and" (in some sense) "rose again from the dead" (Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, p. 5). "Through the veil which mythic fancy has woven around this tragic figure, we can still detect the features of those great yearly changes in earth and sky which, under all distinctions of race and religion, must always touch the natural human heart with alternate emotions of gladness and regret" (*Golden Bough*, second edition; Vol. III., p. 196).

It is clear, therefore, that we are not here dealing with "stories of suffering Saviours, similar in all essentials to the Gospel narratives," as has been so positively asserted of late (cf. Mr. Vivian Phelips, *The Churches and Modern Thought*, p. 161). On the contrary, the worshippers of Adonis, Attis, and Osiris, as well as those of Ceres or Demeter and similar Nature-Powers, were offering adoration to what they believed to be the generative power of Nature, manifesting itself in the birth of men, animals, and plants alike. The very indecency of

their phallic rites shews this. In no respect can any of these deities be called a "Saviour" in the Christian sense, implying as it does an atoning death undergone for man's salvation *from sin*[1] by One who was perfect Man as well as perfect God, the Head of the human race and its representative. Osiris, Attis, and Adonis were gods, not men, though the pathos attached to the metaphor which spoke of their "deaths" appealed (as we have seen) to something in man's heart which testified to his dumb consciousness of his need of a God who could suffer, and could therefore sympathise with man in suffering and death. We who believe in a Divine Purpose working through all things, and who know the love of God as revealed to us in our Lord Jesus Christ, can readily understand that He wished to lead men, even by such dim thoughts as these, to know something of their need of a Saviour, so that when He came they might receive Him. The other theory, that there is nothing in the Christian doctrine of our Lord's atoning death and of His resurrection which was not believed ages before by the Gentiles throughout a very large part of the ancient world, and that this widely accepted myth is the source of these essential parts of the Christian faith, will hardly stand the test of a candid enquiry. It is absolutely unhistorical, in the first place, as our examination of the chief Ethnic legends on the subject proves. We see that any supposed resemblance to the Christian view is due almost entirely to the unscientific use of Christian terms. Deceived by their employment of these, men have fancied that the Ethnic myth contained proof that the leading features of the Christian faith were largely pre-Christian. This is not unlike the experience of simple-minded passengers a generation ago, who not unfrequently clearly saw

[1] Matthew i. 21.

the Equator—or fancied they did—when "crossing the line." It was afterwards shewn that the reason why they saw it was because a thread had been carefully placed inside the telescope. On the other hand, as has already been pointed out, the evidence for our Lord's actual resurrection[1] is so strong that it is incapable of being explained away. It was not necessary therefore that Christians, when going forth at the risk of their lives, in obedience to the command they had heard from Christ's own lips after His resurrection, to preach the Gospel to all creation, should undertake the Herculean task of forming an eclectic but holy religion for themselves from the faiths which had filled the world with vice unspeakable. Nor was it possible for them to mistake a myth for a fact and imagine that their Master had risen from the dead because, forsooth, in an absolutely different sense, Tammuz was said to have returned to earth for some months every year, or Osiris to reign as king of the dead in the Egyptian

[1] It is noteworthy that there is not, and, as far as we know, never has been in the world any religion except the Christian based upon the real or alleged resurrection of its Founder. We have seen that the religions dealt with in this chapter are not so supported. Nor is Buddhism, Islâm, Zoroastrianism, or any other faith. When the Báb was in danger of being put to death in Persia, his followers believed that bullets could not hurt him. But when he was killed, though he had claimed to be the Messiah (among other things), and though the Bábís knew that Christ was stated to have risen from the dead, they did not once try to assert that their Prophet, though an Incarnation, had come to life again. The fact is that such an event is in the highest degree incredible, and nothing short of the most absolutely indisputable proof could convince anyone of it. This proof was present only in a single instance—the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of no other great Teacher could it even be asserted. Yet Mr. Vivian Phelips ventures to affirm about St. Paul's time, "We know that this was an age when the resurrection of any great prophet was taken to be a normal event" !!! (*op. cit.*, p. 58). It would be very interesting to know the names of some of the great prophets of whom Mr. Vivian Phelips was thinking when he wrote this romantic assertion.

Hades. Had it not been for their Master's resurrection they would have had neither a Gospel nor a commission, nor faith for their task, nor a motive for undertaking it, with the assured prospect that the world would hate them as it had hated Christ, and that in it they would have tribulation.[1] But the theory we are considering makes greater demands upon our credulity than even this implies. The early Christians, when they began to spread their faith, must have known *something* of the Master from Whom their enemies derived the name they gave the "brethren." They could have been in no doubt about His actual existence. They must have known at least as much as did Tacitus, that "the originator of that name, Christ, had been executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius."[2] As He was a historical person whom they had known and loved, they at least were hardly likely to mistake Him for a sun-myth.

We have in our Gospels, and to a less degree in the Epistles, a portraiture[3] of Christ, evidently the image of Him which dwelt in the hearts of His early disciples and justified some in the next generation in speaking of themselves[4] as carrying Christ with them. His Resurrection is in keeping with His predictions and with His whole character and the purpose of His life and His death as there described and explained. To what is that portrait due? Is it the work of honest men imperfectly depicting a character so perfect that they have failed to do it justice? Or is it due to Fiction,[5] Myth, or Hallucination?

[1] Cf. *e.g.*, John xvi., 33.

[2] Tacitus, *Annales*, Lib. xv., 44.

[3] See Row's *Jesus of the Evangelists;* Seeley's *Ecce Homo*; Simpson, *The Fact of Christ.*

[4] *Martyrium S. Ignatii*, cap. 2.

[5] Mr. Vivian Phelips writes: "Nothing is more conceivable than that the Bible story may spuriously embellish the real life of Jesus

A study of the whole literature of the world—ancient and modern—is now possible to us, and we are thus able to judge for ourselves what success all these factors, together or apart, have had in enabling the most talented writers and most gifted thinkers, philosophers, and poets of any or every age and clime to represent the ideally Perfect Man. Indian literature depicts for us the characters of Rāma and Krishṇa; Greek, those of Achilles, Agamemnon, and Ulysses; Latin, that of the pious Æneas. Which of these can we compare with the Gospel portraiture of Christ? Yet the Evangelists were not poets, philosophers, or men of great learning, or talented writers. "The[1] very language which they used was not classical Greek. On internal evidence we should conclude that only one or two of them at most can possibly have been writing in their native language. They were, therefore, very heavily handicapped indeed. Hardly any great secular writer has won distinction, and perhaps not one has come to the very front rank, in writing in any but his native tongue. But the Evangelists have, if the theory"

as much as the mythical accounts of Buddha, for instance, spuriously embellish the real life of Prince Siddhārtha" (*The Churches and Modern Thought*, pp. 58, 59). This writer has apparently never read the *Apocryphal* Gospels, or at least has never considered the character of the Jesus there spoken of. In that character and in the incidents there related we have the product of the romantic spirit of that time. Had "spurious embellishments" been employed in our Gospels, how entirely different would have been the portraiture presented to us! It is safe to say that the Apocryphal Gospels are invaluable, because they shew us what our genuine books *would have been* had the mythic influence been at work in them. That they differ *toto cœlo* in spirit from these Apocryphal romances shews that the same tendency could not have given rise to two such entirely opposite results. As the Apocryphal Gospels are the result of the growth of myth or fiction, the canonical Gospels *cannot* be such. Mr. E. Benson well says, "His reporters, the Gospel writers, had but an imperfect conception of His majesty, His ineffable greatness—it could not well be otherwise" (*The House of Quiet*, chap. xii.).

[1] *Religio Critici*, pp. 39, 40.

(that their account is unhistorical) "be correct, contended successfully with all the greatest writers of the world, meeting them on their own ground, and have produced a romance which, in the universal judgment of the whole civilised world, has utterly eclipsed all others in abiding interest and sustained charm. This is what we are asked to believe as the only alternative to accepting the Gospels as simple records of historical facts. But the difficulty of their task is not done full justice to by stating it thus. Other writers have for the most part undertaken merely to draw pictures of a perfect man. The Evangelists did more; they endeavoured to represent the Perfect Man shewing Himself such under the most trying circumstances, but they had to perform their task in such a manner that every recorded word and deed of this character should be in perfect keeping with the claim which they represent Him as making to be One with God and the one Manifestation of God. Still more, they have actually succeeded in doing all this so successfully that the conception of God thus formed in their minds has become the only one possible to even the highest minds in all lands, even at the beginning of the twentieth century after the birth of Christ. Moreover, they, without any model to guide them, had to make their romance so real that it would be accepted as true for many ages, and would be acknowledged, even by those who disbelieved it, to be the lifelike delineation of 'the one character, without the idea of whom in the mind personal piety is impossible.' Can any imaginable degree of credulity accept such a theory as this? Yet, if the character of the Jesus of the Evangelists be not strictly true and real, this is what the Evangelists did."

In conclusion, we must consider the vast difference between the effects produced by the Ethnic myth

of Osiris, Attis, Adonis, and those which resulted from the Christian Gospel of the Resurrection of Christ Jesus. Seldom has the evidence of the universal corruption of morals which quite naturally and inevitably[1] flowed from the Nature-myth been more carefully detailed than by Dr. Frazer. What, on the other hand, was the result produced as a necessary consequence of the reception of faith in the Risen[2] Christ?

Let us hear in the first place what Pliny, their judge, torturer, and in some cases executioner, states that he learnt from early Christian converts as to the duties imposed upon them by their faith. "They[3] used to assert that the sum of (be it their fault or) their error was this, that they had been accustomed on a fixed day to meet together before dawn, and to repeat to one another alternately a hymn to Christ as God, and to bind themselves by a sacrament not to the commission of any crime, but not to commit thefts, robberies, adulteries, not to break their word, not to deny a thing entrusted to them when called upon to restore it." Even

[1] Seneca says of poets who ascribed evil deeds to the gods: "Quid aliud est vitia nostra incendere, quam auctores illis inscribere deos?" (*De Brev. Vitae*, cap. 16).

[2] Dr. Frazer's method of treating this matter is unworthy of any unbiased investigator. He implies that, as Zela in Eastern Pontus appears to have been the chief religious centre of the district, as Christianity had spread there very much by the time Pliny wrote (A.D. 112), as Zela was noted for its great sanctuary of Anaïtis or Semiramis, as at Comana in the same district a religious festival of a vile nature was held in honour of this goddess, and as Corinth, famous for debauchery, was likewise a place where Christianity was early preached, *therefore* there was a close connexion between Christianity and these abominations. "Such," he says, "were some of the hotbeds in which the seeds of Christianity first struck root." It would have been more honest if he had quoted, for example, St. Paul's letters to or from these "hotbeds" (as in the text I have quoted one written from Corinth itself, i.e. 1 Thess.) to show us *what connexion*, if any, the evil practices of those places had with Christian precepts.

[3] Pliny, *Epp.* Lib. x., No. 96.

tender women[1] under torture could not be compelled to confess that Christians were guilty of any worse crimes than these, nor did renegades themselves accuse those whom they had deserted of working "the[2] desire of the Gentiles" and of having, like the worshippers of the Powers of Nature, "walked in lasciviousness, lusts, winebibbings, revellings, carousings, and abominable idolatries." On the contrary, Pliny himself tells us that, in consequence of the large number of those who had been converted from heathenism to Christianity, the temples of the gods had "already[3] been almost deserted," doubtless because Christians had felt themselves called out of darkness to light and bound to walk as children of light. It required all the tortures that he could inflict to compel some of the weaker sort to abandon Christ. When this was done, "the[4] temples once more began to be thronged, and the sacred solemnities which had long ceased began to be observed again," those of Anaïtis and other Nature-goddesses doubtless among them. Braver Christians preferred death[5] to returning to these abominations. Such was the contrast which both Christians and heathens perceived between Christianity and the worship of those Nature-powers for which the district had long been[6] noted. They were in no danger of confounding the two religions—the one pure, the other impure; the one resting on personal knowledge of the Crucified and Risen Christ, the other on an

[1] "Quo magis necessarium credidi ex duabus ancillis, quae ministrae dicebantur, quid esset veri et per tormenta quaerere. Sed nihil aliud inveni quam superstitionem pravam et immodicam" (*ibid.*).

[2] 1 Peter iv. 3. Peter wrote to the "Dispersion" in *Pontus* and that neighbourhood.

[3] Pliny, *op cit.*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] "Supplicium minatus: perseverantes duci iussi" (*ibid.*).

[6] Strabo, xii., 3, 32, and 36; also xii., 2, 3.

allegorical representation of the annual "decay[1] and revival of plant life."

We turn now from external testimony to internal. St. Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, the founder of so many Churches, has left us his epistles to those very Churches, and from them we can judge what attitude Christianity adopted from a moral standpoint with regard to the prevalent heathenism of the time. From Corinth, notorious for its sensuality, he writes to the Thessalonians, reminding[2] them what he had taught them. "For[3] this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to possess himself of his own vessel in sanctification and honour, not in the passion of lust, even as the Gentiles which know not God." It is hardly necessary to quote from his other epistles to shew how sternly he denounced all such evils whether in Corinth[4] or elsewhere. The attitude which Christianity from the very first assumed to all these crimes was that of absolute opposition. No one who committed them had "any[5] inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." Hence those very practices which were of compulsory observance in the case of the Nature-gods and the goddesses associated with them—Cybele, Ishtar, Anaïtis, and the rest—were so contrary to Christianity that indulgence in them *ipso facto* put the sinner out of the Church. Nay more, corrupt as many portions of the Universal Church have since at various times become, this particular series of sins, which were essentially sacred actions in the belief of the worshipper of Adonis and

[1] *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, p. 186.
[2] 1 Thessalonians iv. 2.
[3] 1 Thessalonians iv. 3–5.
[4] 1 Corinthians vi. 9–11; v. 9–13, etc.
[5] Ephesians v. 5.

Attis, have never by Christians been met with anything but the sternest denunciation as deadly to body, soul, and spirit.

In our own day, when the predicted "falling away"[1] has begun, when our newspapers speak cheerfully of the fading of belief in historical or "dogmatic" Christianity, as a natural consequence we see a revival of those very theories and practices with which Christianity engaged in a life and death struggle in the early days. Man, held to have sprung from the brute, is too often excused if he tries to return thither. As a French writer says, "The[2] notion of Law is obliterated; between individuals, classes, nations, appetite is proclaimed as the measure of right; everywhere is the unfolding of the Ego, bestial or sanctimonious; literature is dedicated to various forms of rut, and extreme intellectual refinement leads back by every way to the unbridling of the human brute." So it was in the last years of the previous dispensation, so it is in France now, and so it must be in every land in proportion to the progress in it made by those very same tendencies of thought and conduct which led to the fearful state of things that prevailed at the time when our Lord came "to save His people from their sins." But this very fact shews how great a contrast there is now, and always has been, between the spirit which animated the worshippers of Adonis, Attis, Osiris, and that which worked in the hearts, minds, and lives of the Apostles of Christ. Let us not mistake darkness for light, evil for good, Christ for Belial. Even to the present day, wherever it has not been overthrown by Christianity, the ancient worship of the procreative powers of Nature still continues. We find it in India in our

[1] 2 Thessalonians ii., 3, ἡ ἀποστασία, "the Revolt," cf. Farrar, *The Witness of History to Christ*, pp. 6–8.

[2] J. Darmesteter, *Les Prophètes d'Israël*, Pref., p. x.

own time, where these powers are represented as Šiva, and his wife Durgā, where 30,000,000 of stone phallic emblems are said to be worshipped in different parts of the country, and where unfortunate girl children are "married to the god" to-day, for exactly the same form of worship and service as that which was rendered by the ἱεροδοῦλαι of the ancient world. Neither there nor in Syria of old do we find purity springing from impurity. Christianity is the antithesis of this kind of Nature-worship, while at the same time the Gospel unfolds to man the truth which underlies all that mass of error, and which, when perverted, has, in the modern as in the ancient world, degraded men below the level of the beasts that perish.

OUR MODERN MYTHOLOGISTS

versus

THE VIRGIN-BIRTH

A RECENT writer informs us that, in his opinion, there are certain "ideas, universal in their range, and found fully developed in the depths of savagery, which, rising with mankind from plane to plane of civilisation, have at last been embodied in the faith and symbolism of the loftiest and most spiritual of the great religions of the world—the religion of civilised Europe" (Hartland, *Legend of Perseus*, Vol. I., 1894, preface). The *one* idea of this description which he selects to prove his thesis is that of a supernatural Birth.

Another writer expresses himself thus: "Of all old-world legends, the death and resurrection of a virgin-born, or in some way divinely-born, Saviour was the most widespread" (Mr. Vivian Phelips, *The Churches and Modern Thought*, p. 59).

A third author says, "Such tales of virgin-mothers are relics of an age of childish ignorance, when men had not yet recognised the intercourse of the sexes as the true cause of offspring. That ignorance, still shared by the lowest of existing savages, the aboriginal tribes of Australia, was doubtless at one time universal among mankind" (Dr. Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, Bk. II., p. 220).

The first two of these writers make a very definite assertion, and the third endeavours to frame a theory

to account for the fact which they have so positively alleged. We shall see that careful study of the whole subject proves that the asserted fact of the widespread belief in the Virgin-birth of a Saviour among the supporters of Ethnic faiths does not rest upon solid foundations. But even if it did, Dr. Frazer's hypothesis to account for such a belief is hardly satisfactory. We must briefly examine it before proceeding to test the alleged fact which it is intended to explain.

Dr. Frazer (1) asserts that the savages of Australia are ignorant of a certain matter of universal experience; and (2) then uses the world "doubtless" as all-sufficient evidence (it *must* suffice, for he has none other to adduce) in proof of his theory that this ignorance was once shared by all men, and was the cause of the asserted widespread belief in Virgin-births. In such a case it would be natural to suppose that, as the hypothetical savage at first imagined all births to be Virgin-births, therefore, when he found that this was not generally the case, he would at once give up *all* belief in such phenomena. But Dr. Frazer supposes that the savage drew this conclusion in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases, and yet in the thousandth instance still clung to his "childish ignorance." If so, we have to enquire why he did this. The theory does not explain it.

It is by no means certain that even the aborigines of Australia, or any single tribe among them, really were ever in such a state of ignorance. To say nothing of the evidence afforded by the vocabularies of their languages, the very strict rules which exist in every tribe to regulate marriage within certain strictly defined limits and the prohibition of adultery inculcated in the tribal "mysteries," both these things render it more than doubtful whether the Australian aborigines are or ever were ignorant of the physiological fact referred to. There is absolutely no evidence

then that the supposed original savage "shared" an ignorance which did not exist even in Australia. If he did not, Dr. Frazer's explanation falls to the ground.

It requires a great deal of credulity to enable anyone to accept his theory. The self-mutilation of Attis in the fable, and that of the Galli in history, do not look as if people were ever so very ignorant as he would have us believe. The details which he gives of the method adopted in order to promote the fertility of the soil, by imitating what people supposed to be the fertilising and procreative processes at work in the world around them, serve rather to shew how continually such thoughts obsessed men's minds even in very ancient days. The widespread idea that the Sky was the Father of all things in a very literal sense, and Earth their Mother, tends in the same direction. When, in addition to this, we consider the almost universal prevalence of phallic worship, we are compelled to withhold assent to Dr. Frazer's attempted explanation of belief in Virgin-birth.

Some writers have persistently confounded with one another two very distinct things: (1) Virgin-birth, and (2) birth attributed in some other manner to supernatural influence. As the Christian faith is concerned only with the former, and that too only in the case of our Lord, it is imperatively necessary to distinguish these from one another. This Mr. Sidney Hartland has not done. The whole question is of considerable interest, and doubtless much may be learnt from studying it carefully. But in order that this may be possible we must recognise the distinction to which we have called attention. To confound two different things is quite unscientific, and can hardly be conducive to clearness of thought or to an accurate conclusion.

By distinguishing between the two different kinds

of alleged supernatural birth, we are able to dispense with the consideration of every instance in which birth from a Virgin is not distinctly mentioned as an essential part of the narrative. Those which, though supposed to be in some manner supernatural, are in no sense Virgin-births form the vast majority, both in mythology, Greek, Roman, Hindū, etc., and in folk-lore and fairy tales. With regard to these it is sufficient for our present purpose to say that they bear witness to men's consciousness that there is no effect without a cause. They felt that people in any way specially remarkable required to be accounted for somehow. Fairy tales may be an evidence of ancient belief in Animism, perhaps of nothing else. But legends connected with the birth of actual historical characters are of interest, because they shew a belief in Divine interposition, and in something remotely resembling a Divine mission.

What is remarkable is that, while in mythology supernatural births of the *second* class are common enough, yet *Virgin*-birth hardly ever appears either in Ethnic mythology or in fables about well-known historical characters. This is a point upon which it is necessary to insist, because it is one not generally recognised. Those who are acquainted with classical mythology will readily understand what we mean. The Greek myths about the birth of the offspring of Zeus by human mothers, such as Ægina, Alcmena, Europa, Io, and Maia, for example, were in no sense associated with Virgin-birth. On the contrary, the myths are most unpleasantly realistic from the material point of view. Zeus, we are told, transformed himself into a bull on one occasion, into a man on another, always employing a material form for the purpose. When we remember that the myth originally denoted that the fertility of the earth is due to the rain from the sky, we shall see that the

material element is an essential part of the story. People were so well aware that the union of the sexes is necessary to the production of offspring that they could not conceive of the fertility of the earth without explaining it in the same way. The gods and goddesses themselves, as we learn from Homer, were possessed of material bodies, capable of being mutilated or wounded in battle, needing refreshment in sleep, nourishment at the banquet. Hence the tales told about Zeus' conduct with reference to those mortals, who by him became the mothers of Hercules and other demigods, were certainly not intended by those who invented and accepted these myths to imply the Virgin-birth of these fabulous heroes. Hindū mythology is strikingly similar to Greek in the carnal vileness of its narratives. It is quite possible that these were originally mere allegories, and as Nature-myths were free from offence; but in mythology they soon became something very different.

One of the earliest Greek opponents of Christianity, whose work has in part been preserved to us—Celsus—refers to the myths relating to the births of Perseus (thus anticipating Mr. Sidney Hartland), Amphion, Æacus, and Minos, and argues from them in opposition to the Christian belief in our Lord's Virgin-birth. In his reply Origen points to the tales regarding Danaë, Melanippe, Augē, and Antiope as a proof that even the heathens felt that it was necessary to account in some supernatural way for the existence of persons far superior to ordinary humanity. Reasoning from this admission he enquires which was the more suitable in Christ's case, a birth in accordance with the usual order of things, or one of quite a different kind. Such a reply would be unanswerable; but it would have been well had Origen then gone on to point out

the difference between such myths as those of the Greeks, which did not imply Virgin-birth, and the Gospel narratives which his opponent had assailed.

Among persons who have actually played a part in history, if we may except certain dynasties of kings such as the Pharaohs, it is rare to find any whose birth is said to have been in any way supernatural. Mr. Vivian Phelips tells us that "the disciples of Plato, centuries before the Christian era," believed that he was born of a virgin (*The Churches and Modern Thought*, p. 128). This is an error. Diogenes Laërtius, who wrote about 200 A.D., mentions the fable that Perictione, Plato's mother, received a visit from Apollo, but he does not attach any credit to it, nor does he imply that a single one of Plato's disciples really believed anything of the sort. Nor, in such a case, could it be said that they held any belief in *Virgin*-birth. Suidas is also referred to in support of the fable; but, as he wrote about 1100 A.D., his authority cannot be considered of any importance. Justin the historian in his epitome of Trogus Pompeius (Lib. XV., chap. 4) mentions a similar legend about Seleucus, saying that it was sometimes stated that, though Laudice his mother was the wife of Antiochus, one of Philip of Macedon's leading generals, his father was Apollo. Here again the myth did not mention a *virgin*-birth, nor was it seriously accepted by anyone. In fact, such statements seem to have been merely poetical quotations, so to speak, from the old mythology, the intention being to flatter Seleucus or Plato, as the case might be, by comparing him to Æsculapius or some other legendary character who was said to be a son of the brilliant god.

Alexander the Great, when his success in war had turned his head, claimed divine descent, but this was due to the fact that the priest of Ammon in Egypt

had, in accordance with Egyptian custom, termed the king son of that god, whom the Greeks identified with their own Zeus. Hence it was supposed that Philip of Macedon had not been his real father. But this brings us to the consideration of Eastern tales of this nature. We discover them first among the Semites of Babylon, where the king came to be recognised as a god, and hence required divine descent to be predicated regarding him. According to Professor Sayce, the deification of the Pharaohs was due to "the Asiatic element in the Egyptian population" (*Religions of Ancient Eg. and Bab.*, pp. 43, 351, 352). Hence each Pharaoh was declared to be "Son of the Sungod" (*Se Rā*). But, though some modern writers have incorrectly spoken of the Egyptian texts as teaching the virgin-birth of one or more of these monarchs, this is not the case. For example, the expression has been used regarding Amon-hotep III (Sayce, *op. cit.*, pp. 249, 250), but the language of the inscription which tells of that monarch's conception is only too unmistakably clear. The god Amon-Rā is there represented as saying that he had "incarnated himself *in the royal person* of this husband, Thothmes IV" (see Sayce's own version, *ibid.*). The text explains that, this being taken for granted, Amon-hotep's birth was quite in accordance with the usual order of things, though his divinity is asserted, according to custom, because his father, Thothmes IV, being a Pharaoh, was as such an incarnation of the Sungod.

In China we find, in the case of one historical person, and one other who may be historical, a fable which puts us strikingly in mind of some of the fairy tales which Mr. Sidney Hartland has collected in reference to beings who have never existed at all. It is stated that the mother of Fo-hi, the mythical founder of the Chinese Empire, ate a

flower which she found lying on her clothes on her return from bathing. In consequence of this her son was born. The ancestor of the Manchu dynasty was also said to have been conceived in almost exactly the same way, except that his mother ate a red fruit instead of a flower. Such myths abound in folk-lore, but they are rarely connected with persons who really existed (*Legend of Perseus*, Vol. I., pp. 106, 107). Fo-hi's existence is very doubtful, which perhaps accounts for the matter. The same tale (practically) that was told about him was told about the founder of a rival dynasty, possibly through confusion between them. Not only is it impossible to discover how many ages after their deaths these tales first arose, but also there is no proof that they were ever intended to be believed.

The assertion that the worshippers of Attis, Mithra, and Krishṇa all believed in the virgin-birth of their respective deity has already been tested in these pages and proved devoid of foundation. We have also examined a similar statement made regarding Buddha, and have seen that it is quite unfounded. The way in which such things are rashly affirmed nowadays among us well exemplifies what Newman somewhere calls "reckless assertion based on groundless assumption."

Mr. Vivian Phelips assures us that "in Persia Zoroaster was miraculously conceived" (*The Churches*, etc., p. 128). If by this he means to say that the Zoroastrians really believed that their great teacher was born of a virgin, it is at least strange that *nothing whatever is said on the subject*, either in the *Avesta* itself or in later Zoroastrian works. It is not too much to say that the idea is entirely due to modern mythology. In the *Avesta* itself we are told that Zoroaster's father was a man named Pôurushaspa (*Vendidad*, xix. 6, *cf. vv.* 6 and 46;

Yasna, ix. 13; *Yasht*, v. 18, xxiii. 4, xxiv. 2), and his genealogy is traced back for ten generations. His mother's name, Dughdhōva (later Dogdo), does not occur in the *Avesta*, so far was any thought of virgin-birth from occurring to the Zoroastrians, even in the comparatively late times in which much of the *Avesta* was composed. We are informed that Zoroaster was born to reward his father for being so faithful in offering libations of the sacred *haoma*-juice. and that is all. Myths did ultimately grow up about the historical Zoroaster. Pliny, for instance, tells us that Zoroaster laughed on the day of his birth, and that he lived for thirty years in the wilderness on cheese (Lib., XXX. 1, 2, § 39). Yet he knew nothing about anything miraculous in connexion with his birth. Even in the *Dasātir i Āsmānī*, a Pahlavī work composed at earliest in the time of the Sāsānides, we are merely told that Zoroaster was son (perhaps descendant) of Spitama and traced his ancestry to Luhrāsp, and that he was a prophet. In the *Shāhnāmah* (beginning of Vol. III) we learn that Zoroaster was a prophet, but nothing is told us about virgin-birth. Even in the *Zarātusht-Nāmah*, dated A.D. 1278, there is nothing of this kind recorded. From tradition we learn that Pôurushaspa drank some *haoma*-juice, in which Ōrmazd had placed Zoroaster's *fravashi* (soul). Thereafter Dughdōva conceived her son in the usual way (*Dinkart*, vii., 2. 7–10, 14, *sqq.*; *Yasht*, iii., 2, 6; *Yasht*, xix., 81; *Zaratān*, sect. iv., *vv.* 68, *sqq.*). So far from this being an instance of virgin-birth, Zoroaster was the *third* of five brothers (*Zad Sparam*, xv., 5).[1] Hence it is clear either that Mr. Phelips uses words with an esoteric meaning, or that here again facts are so unfortunate as not quite to agree with his statements.

[1] *Vide* Rosenburgh's edition of the text of the *Zarātusht-Nāmah*, (St. Petersburg, 1904).

The same writer, turning to Egypt for a moment, makes a very important statement about one of the deities worshipped there. "In Egypt," he says, "Horus, who had the epithet of 'Saviour,' was born of the virgin Isis. The Egyptian Bible, remember, is the oldest in the world" (*The Churches*, etc., p. 128). This must mean (1) that the *Book of the Dead* styles Horus "Saviour," and (2) that the same book states that his mother Isis was a virgin. These statements are of great interest, and the only thing which can in any degree be held to lessen their importance is the fact that they are not quite correct. This, of course, is a mere detail, often overlooked in modern mythology. Maspero tells us that, amid the tangled wilderness of Egyptian myths, there is one which represents the *cow*, Isis, as producing a son, Horus, independently. But this might be styled *heifer*-birth more correctly than anything else. He explains this as intended to signify the great fertility of the Delta. No such myth, however, appears in "the Egyptian Bible," nor among the many titles there given to "Horus, son of Isis," is there one that can rightly be translated "Saviour" in any possible sense. In the *Book of the Dead*, Horus is called "Horus inhabiter of the Sun-disc, Horus of the two eyes, Horus without eyes, Horus the blue-eyed, Horus son of Isis, Horus son of Hathor, Horus son of Osiris, Horus begotten of Ptaḥ, Horus dweller in blindness, Horus traveller of eternity, Horus the avenger of his father, Horus in the pilot's place in the boat, Horus of the two horizons," many of which titles show that he was a Sun-god. But he is not called "Saviour." As for the virgin-birth of Horus, which is the matter under consideration, so far is this from being taught in "the Egyptian Bible," that, as we have seen, more than one father is there ascribed to him. Dr. Budge

well sums up the information on the subject given us in the book by saying that Isis is represented as raising up the body of the murdered Osiris and "being united to him" before she conceived and brought forth her son Horus. Horus was therefore a posthumous son of Osiris, whose death he undertook to avenge (Introd. to version of *Book of the Dead*, p. lxxx.). This fact, that Osiris was Horus' father, is confirmed by a Hymn to Osiris quoted by Chabas (*Revue Archéologique*, 1857, p. 65). Plutarch's account agrees with this (*De Iside et Osiride*, cap. 19). The details are so fully given in such clear and undisguised language that they entirely remove any doubt whatever regarding the manner of Horus' conception. Plutarch tells also of an elder Horus (*op. cit.*, cap. 12), and his narrative results in the conviction that even when she herself was born Isis was no longer a virgin. An instructive idea of the Egyptian belief regarding Isis is given in Professor Maspero's *Les Inscriptions des Pyramids de Saqqarah*, from which Dr. Budge gives an extract (*Book of the Dead*, Introd., p. cxxxiv.). This should suffice to shew how far the worship of Isis was from leading to moral purity of heart or life, as more than one modern mythologist has asserted it did. We cannot venture to transcribe such passages for obvious reasons. What has been already said, however, should suffice. Let us hope that in the case of such a highly imaginative writer as Mr. Vivian Phelips the dictum of Schlegel may ultimately be verified. "The extremes of error, when this has reached the acme of extravagance, often accelerate the return to truth" (*Philosophy of History*, Lecture 1, *fin.*).

Passing from ancient times to time still future, we find in the religious books of the Zoroastrians the statement that, before the end of the world, three

prophets, descendants of Zoroaster, are to be born at intervals, to teach people his law. They will be messengers of Ahura Mazda, and will co-operate with one another in destroying all the mischief wrought by demons and men (*Yasht*, xiii., 142). Though born of three different mothers, they will be in the most literal manner sprung from Zoroaster's seed. Regarding not a single one of these future prophets is any hint given that he was expected to be virgin-born, as is often stated by modern mythologists. The fact is that such clear details are given about the manner of the conception of each that it is impossible to translate them into a modern language. One of the three is Saoshyant,[1] also called Astvaṭ-ereta. His mother's name will be Vīspa-taurvī, and she will conceive him while bathing in Lake Kāsavī. A slightly different form of the myth, in which Ōrmazd is to take the part of Zoroaster as parent of the child, is mentioned by Eznik (*Refutation of Heresies*, Armenian original, Bk. II., cap. x., p. 133 of the Constantinople ed. of 1873). *Whichever* of the two accounts we take, Mr. J. M. Robertson's assertion that Saoshyant is Virgin-born in Pārsī mythology (*Pagan Christs*, p. 339) is incorrect. He seems, moreover, to have studied the subject rather cursorily, as he evidently confounds Saoshyant, the future prophet, with Sraosha the archangel.

Thus our careful investigation of the subject leads

[1] De hoc Horomazae nuntio futuro, illo in libro, qui Creatio (*Būndihishnīh*) appellatur, dicitur fore ut, saeculi iam appropinquante fine, haec puella in eo, cuius mentionem fecimus, lacu corpus abluens, e Zoroastris *semine* ibi servato gravida facta filium pariat. Num puella semine virili gravida *virgo* appellari potest? The account of the conception of Saoshyant's companions, Ukhshaṭ-ereta and Ukhshaṭ-nemañh, is similar. *Vide Vendīdād* xix, 4–6; *Yasht* xiii., 128, 142; *Būndihishnīh* xxxii., 8, 9. The date of *Yasht* xiii. is approximately fixed at about 200 B.C. by the fact of the mention of Gaotema (Gautama Buddha) in § 16.

to the conclusion: (1) that Virgin-birth, strictly so-called, either forms no part whatever of any great religion but the Christian, or that it has crept in, if at all, only very late indeed; (2) that even in mythology (which Mr. Grant Allen quite wisely distinguishes from religion) mention of anything which at all resembles Virgin-birth is extremely rare; (3) but that, on the other hand, tales of supernatural births of an *entirely different* kind are found in some religions, and especially in mythologies. These facts are well worthy of reflection, but they do not at all bear out the assertions which we have quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Folk-lore and mythology show that stories of supernatural births which bear *no resemblance* to the Gospel narrative were and are current in different lands among the mass of the ignorant, though it is clear from the way these tales are told that they are not taken in earnest even by the most credulous. They should fittingly be ranked with fairy tales or such stories as those related in the *Arabian Nights*, in *Appuleius*, and in other works of fiction composed for the amusement and entertainment of the uneducated, or of those for whom literature of a more serious character, if it existed, possessed little charm.

Should evidence ever be forthcoming to prove what has certainly not yet been proved, that belief in Virgin-birth was at one time widespread, we shall then have to try to account for it. Dr. Frazer *assumes* that this belief was extensively held, and he *assumes*, in order to explain this, (1) that men were originally in a savage state, and (2) that they were then ignorant of a physiological fact of some importance. We have already briefly commented on the second of these two assumptions. The former of the two has been often stated as a fact and not as a theory. But there are grave difficulties in the way

of our accepting it.[1] As Professor Sayce says, "It has first to be proved that modern savagery is not due to degeneration rather than to arrested development, and that the forefathers of the civilised nations of the ancient world were ever on the same level as the savage of to-day. In fact, the savage of to-day is not, and cannot be, a representative of primitive man. If the ordinary doctrine of development is right, primitive man would have known nothing of those essentials of human life and progress of which no savage community has hitherto been found to be destitute. He would have known nothing of the art of producing fire, nothing of language, without which human society would be impossible. On the other hand, if the civilised races of mankind possessed from the outset the germs of culture and the power to develop it, they can in no way be compared with the savages of the modern world, who have lived, generation after generation, stationary and unprogressive, like the beasts that perish, even though at times they may have been in contact with a higher civilisation. To explain the religious beliefs and usages of the Greeks and Romans from the religious ideas and customs of Australians or Hottentots is in most cases but labour in vain; and to seek the origin of Semitic religion in the habits and superstitions of low-caste Bedawīn is like looking to the gipsies for an explanation of European Christianity" (*Rel. of Ancient Eg. and Bab.*, pp. 17, 18). M. Renan also writes, "No branch of the Indo-European or the Semitic races has fallen to the savage state. Everywhere these two races reveal themselves to us with a certain degree of culture. . . . We must therefore suppose that civilised races have not passed through the savage state, and that they bore in themselves

[1] See my *Comparative Religion*, ch. i., Longmans and Co., 1/-.

from the beginning the germ of future progress" (*Hist. Gén. des Langues Sém*: Vol. I., p. 484).

It is impossible, therefore, to grant the assumption that men were originally savages, and that modern savages' beliefs represent those from which all religions have sprung. It would be manifestly absurd and unhistorical to derive our Christian doctrines from the superstitions of wandering gipsies, but to some people it seems quite scientific to imagine that they have practically sprung from savages in the condition of the Australian aborigines. Until somewhat better proof is afforded us than has yet been adduced, however, we can hardly be expected, from any point of view, to admit that, as Mr. Sidney Hartland suggests, the doctrine of our Lord's Virgin-birth has become embodied in the Christian faith on no better ground than that of the survival of a belief "fully developed in the depths of savagery." There is *no* proof that savages hold or have ever held such a doctrine at all; nor is there any really conclusive proof that the civilised nations of the world have ever passed through a condition at all resembling that of the savages still to be found in a few of the countries of the world.

Although belief in Virgin-birth, properly so called, cannot be proved to have been widespread, yet there can be no doubt that in many parts of the world we do find stories which assert something supernatural in the case of fabulous heroes, and to a less degree in that of certain great men of the past. We have seen that it is impossible to derive the Christian doctrine of Christ's Virgin-birth from such sources, especially as it arose among Jews, who had no such myths current among them. But the question remains, How did the idea of supernatural births arise among the heathen? Are these all to be accounted for, as some undoubtedly may be, by considering them to be Nature-myths?

Or may there be a deeper meaning in them? May they not have sprung up through some ancient tradition, misunderstood and corrupted? And may not their preservation, if not their origination, evince the existence of a felt need, the yearning of the human heart for some proof of the nearness and the care of the Divine?

Dr. Frazer says, "The notion . . . of a human being endowed with divine or supernatural powers belongs essentially to that earlier period of religious history in which gods and men are still viewed as beings of much the same order, and before they are divided by the impassable gulf which, to later thought, opens out between them ("*Golden Bough*," 2nd Ed., Vol. I., p. 131).

May it not, on the contrary, be that it was just to prevent men from feeling themselves separated from God by a deep "impassable gulf," that human consciousness of need readily grasped the tradition which, found among so many nations, declared that at one time the gods had walked with men? Tradition told of a Golden Age and of a Fall: but even the narrative of the occurrence of the latter proved the conviction that at one time it had been possible for man to enjoy communion with his Maker. If any lingering remembrance of that happy age survived—and this we know was the case—it was not unlikely that men would enquire whether there was still hope of restoration to their lost estate. Hence the Divine Promise of a coming Saviour, to be born of a woman (Gen. iii. 15), would very naturally be cherished, in some form or other, among men. It would not be strange were theories to arise on the subject, and if these theories were degraded more and more in proportion as the conception of the Divine declined among the heathen nations. Men might readily suppose that there would be something supernatural about the birth of the

promised Saviour, and this may, in some measure, account for such legends on the subject as were really believed in some parts of the ancient world. The idea would, no doubt, be easily capable of great abuse; it might degenerate into an incident in popular fables; but none the less it would, in the minds of the thoughtful and pious, prevent the growth of that feeling of an utter and hopeless separation between God and man which must otherwise have come about.

On the other hand, if we suppose that popular fancy, quite independently and with no apparent reason, evolved the idea of supernatural—nay, even of Virgin—birth, then we must conclude one of two things: either (1) that it is an unmeaning delusion, or (2) that it was developed under Divine guidance. Here again we reach the same conclusion to which an examination into the question of sacrifice also leads (*vide* my *Comparative Religion*, ch. iii., Longmans and Co.). If we take the Christian view, everything readily falls into its place. We see, indeed, in Ethnic faiths perversions of originally noble conceptions, we perceive the gradual progress of degradation in all religions, we find religion often turned into a curse, as Lucretius thought it (*De Rerum Natura*, Lib. I., 63, 64; 79–102; 931, 932, etc.), and not a blessing. Yet throughout all "one unceasing purpose runs," a Divine plan for the education of the human race in things of the utmost importance to them, a gradual preparation for a fuller revelation of God in Christ Jesus, for man's restoration to the state of peace with God from which he had fallen. On the other hand, if we reject this view, everything is meaningless and absurd, and that too in the most vital department of human life and history. Religion has always played, for good or ill, a greater part in the affairs of the human race than anything else. As no other department of the world's affairs has

ever been neglected by the Creator, it seems contrary at once to reason and to analogy to suppose that this has been overlooked by Him. It is true that in religious and moral matters we have to make allowance for the operation of other factors besides the Divine. Human freewill and the opposition of evil spiritual powers have, here as elsewhere, introduced and continued in existence not only elements of discord but also evils of the worst description. Yet all the more on that account, as the religious instinct has been implanted and perpetuated in man, must we believe that God's purpose will ultimately be wrought out in its guidance and development, that false views will be gradually eliminated or confuted, and that every element of truth will be preserved and caused to shine more and more clearly for man's enlightenment and perfecting, until he is at last restored to that perfect harmony with the will and character of God which his true and lasting happiness demands. The more evident may become, therefore, the wide diffusion of belief in the possibility of supernatural birth of whatever kind, the more clearly shall we see that *some* truth underlies the idea, and that there must be *some* foundation for the fancy. The false coin presupposes the genuine, and would never have existed but for it. In the Gospel, as we learn why men were led to believe in the possibility of a Divine Incarnation (see my *Comparative Religion*, ch. ii.), so we are taught what is the great fact which accounts for Ethnic belief in supernatural births. In this respect, as in others, Christ not only "fulfilled" the Law and the Prophets, but also satisfied and in a sense justified the instinct which in many parts of the world led men at least to recognise the possibility of a supernatural birth. The very existence of so many varied forms of legends of births of this kind shows

that such a thing is not "unthinkable." The explanation of the belief is not that men were originally ignorant savages, and that Christianity has incorporated into itself one of their quite unaccountable vagaries of thought; on the contrary, it is that, even when fallen into savagery or into false religious beliefs, many tribes still preserved in a corrupt form lingering traces of a remembrance of a Divine Promise which constituted man's only hope, and which was fulfilled in the fulness of time.

does this [illegible] the creation of man already civilized?
In any case, the author has not proved the virgin birth in the case of Jesus.
Mary was the wife of Joseph, and there is nothing out of the ordinary in a married woman having a baby.

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