

THE THEORY OF THE PRE-CHRISTIAN JESUS.

BY WILLIAM BENJAMIN SMITH.

INASMUCH as the examination of Professor Haupt's arguments¹ for the Aryan descent of the Jesus has legitimately led to a discussion of the origin of the Cult of the Jesus and to a concise indication of my own views on that matter, it seems good to make a very brief summary of the theses in *Der vorchristliche Jesus*, in which the proof will be found detailed.

I.

A. The phrase τὰ περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, four times recurrent in the New Testament, means the *Cult (or Doctrine) of the Jesus*, which was zealously preached and taught round the Mediterranean by missionaries entirely independent of Jerusalem and ignorant of any human life of the Jesus as presented in the Gospels (Acts xviii. 24-28).

B. Numerous other evidences in Acts attest unmistakably that the Christian movement did not proceed originally from Jerusalem or even from Palestine as from a unique focus, but simultaneously from many geographically independent foci. Thus the new religion was established in Damascus before Paul went thither (Acts ix. 10-22); thus Aquila and Priscilla were apparently Christians just from Rome (Acts xviii. 1-4). Similarly Elymas (in Paphos) was called Bar-Jesus (son or disciple of Jesus) and was a "pseudoprophet," which in the New Testament always means a more or less heretical *Christian* teacher.

C. The accounts in Acts ii. 5-13 and viii. 1 ff. confirm the foregoing conclusions as to the practically simultaneous outburst of the propaganda all around the Mediterranean.

D. This becomes intelligible only on the supposition of a widespread secret cult of a Deity, the Jesus (the Saviour-God). The

¹ Haupt, "The Aryan Ancestry of Jesus," *Open Court*, April, 1909.

organizations worshipping this Deity were variously named in various places, but were everywhere intent upon the Kingdom of God or of the Heavens, which accordingly appears frequently in the Gospels as a *secret* organization.

[In the present writer's forthcoming book, *Ecce Deus*, this capital matter of the primitive secrecy of the cult receives full treatment, not only the fact but also its reason and necessity being set forth, along with the related fact that the current diction of the Proto-christians was symbolic, as copiously illustrated in the Gospels. It is a misconstruction of this symbolism (by second century ecclesiasticism) that has for 1800 years concealed the true nature of Proto-christianity, which was an organized crusade of Greek-Jewish monotheism against the prevalent polytheism. These early crusaders called their doctrine the *Gnosis*, the knowledge of the one true God "in the person of Christ," under the aspect of the Saviour or Healer (Jesus), who healed humanity of the foul disease of idolatry, described especially as possession by a legion of *demons*, that is, of heathen gods, whose expulsion or overthrow was the mission of the Jesus, as even Justin Martyr bears witness.]

II.

A. The epithet Nazoræus (variously spelled, the oldest spelling being most likely NASARÆUS) is not derived from a "city called Nazareth"; there was in fact no such city at the beginning of our era. The epithet is an appellation primarily of a Deity; it is formed after the analogy of Hebrew proper names ending in *iah*, as Zachariah, the *iah* representing *Jehovah* (pronounced Yahveh, Yahu, or Yah), and is derived from the familiar Old Semitic *nazar* meaning *keep, guard, protect*, so that the Syriac Nazarya' is very nearly *Guardian-Yah*. The names Jesus and Nazaræus differ about as *Salvator* and *Servator*.

B. The Nazarenes (or Nasarees) were in all likelihood the worshipers of Nazarya' and according to Epiphanius were "before Christ and knew not Christ." They are mentioned in Acts xxiv. 5, and Paul was one of them. They seem to have been hardly distinguishable from the *Jessees* also mentioned by Epiphanius, apparently an early name for the worshipers of the Jesus. Amid some uncertainty of detail the ground-fact that Nazaree is derived from the Hebrew stem N-s-r, meaning *protect*, remains indubitable.

C. The name "Jesus" as "the God of the Hebrews" is invoked in a very old "Hebraic word" derived from the Essenes and with

practical certainty uninfluenced by Christianity and dating from before our era.

D. The name Nazaria occurs in a very old magic papyrus copied from an extremely old original, which we have no reason for dating below the beginning of our era.

III.

A. The primitive reference of the term *Anastasis* (upraising) was not to any resurrection from the dead but to establishment, installation in authority and power. The expression "God hath raised up Jesus," a slogan of the primitive propaganda, was originally exactly parallel both in Greek and in Hebrew with "God hath raised up David," "God hath raised up a prophet," and referred to the induction of the Jesus into the functions of world-ruler, vice-Jehovah, plenipotentiary delegate of Deity. This primal sense is still preserved in certain passages in Acts, as v. 30, xiii. 23 (where ἤγειρε is attested by many very old witnesses). The reference to a resurrection from the dead is a later turn given to the ambiguous phrase, as indicated by the loose connection and uncertain textual warrant of the words "from the dead" (ἐκ νεκρῶν).

B. The "Coming of the Kingdom," or the "Parousia of the Coming One," referred primarily to the establishment of the new Deity (the Jesus) in power on earth, as already established (by decree of God, Rom. i. 4) in heaven (Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in heaven also on earth). There was only *one* such Coming. The notion of a *second* Coming crept in late and formed no part of the primitive preaching. It was superinduced upon the original framework to glaze over a disagreeable contradiction of history (2 Peter iii. 4).

C. Similarly the primitive conception of the sudden instantaneous and catastrophic Coming was transformed into the later notion of gradual development, like the fermentation of leaven;—the germ of this notion was given in the original secrecy of the propaganda.

IV.

The Parable of the Sower in its original form contained only three classes (those choked by the weeds being a later insertion) and referred not to any preaching of the Word but to the creation of the human race. The Sower was God himself, the Word sown was the spermatic or seminal Logos so frequent in the Stoics and Philo and even in the New Testament and Justin Martyr, the active

Principle of history, which was in gnostic theory sown down into the world and which sprang up in three classes of men: the "choic" or earthly, the "psychic" or animal, and the "pneumatic" or spiritual. These "psychics (men of soul) who have not spirit" meet us in Jude xix., and the *psychic* as opposed to the *pneumatic* body in I Cor. xv. 44-46.

V.

The Epistle to the Romans in its present form was a comparatively late addition to the New Testament, as attested and certified by a great variety of facts. It was never cited by the early Christian writers, even where citation was most urgently indicated, and seems to have been unknown (even in Rome) for nearly one hundred years after its supposed composition by St. Paul. But much of the material out of which it was set together was much older, some of it dating perhaps from a time prior to the beginning of our era. In this connection the reader's attention may be called to the writer's three memoirs on this epistle in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1901, 1902); to one on the same epistle in the *Hibbert Journal*, No. 2, and to two memoirs on the Pauline manuscripts F and G, in the *American Journal of Theology*, July and October, 1903.