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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

<i>Frontispiece.</i> JOHANN GOTTFRIED VON HERDER.	
<i>Jesus and John the Baptist.</i> ROBERT P. RICHARDSON.....	577
<i>Herder and the Theory of Evolution.</i> BIRGER R. HEADSTORM....	596
<i>Diabolus Simia Dei.</i> MAXIMILIAN RUDWIN.....	602
<i>Belief and Reason: A Study in the Nature of Belief and Its Place in Religious Experience.</i> JOHN W. WATERHOUSE....	612
<i>Self-Government in Religion.</i> M. E. ROBINSON.....	622
<i>Lao Tse and Laoism.</i> H. G. CREEL.....	628
<i>Faith.</i> (Poem) CHARLES S. REID.....	640

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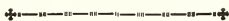
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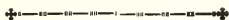


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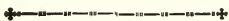


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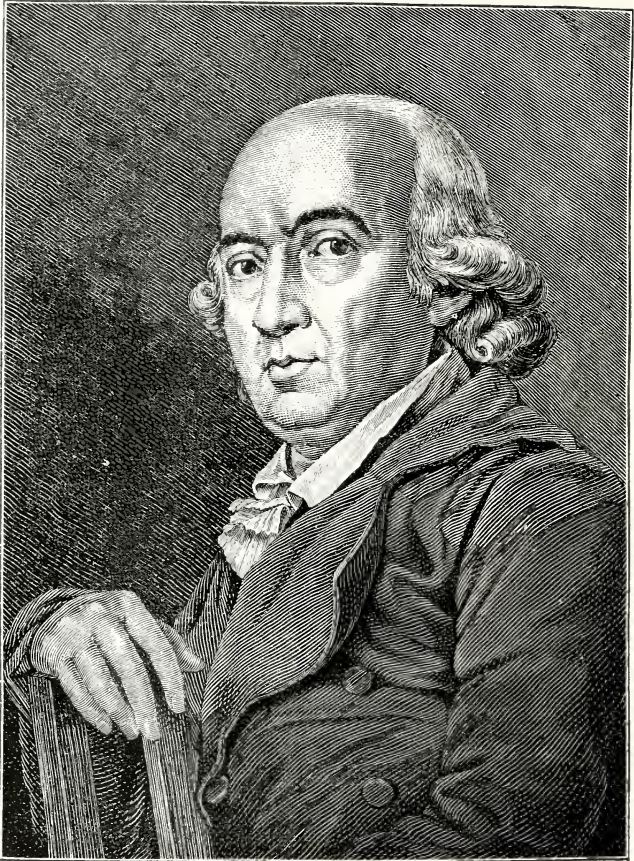
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JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

BY ROBERT P. RICHARDSON

ONE of the most interesting episodes in the life of Jesus of Nazareth was his initiation into a religious career through the influence of John the Baptist. Up to the time of his contact with the latter he who was to gain renown as the Prophet of Nazareth, and ultimately be enthroned in the hearts of Christians as a God, was merely a humble artisan: a carpenter. Of this there can be no question, for *Mark* vi. 3 tells us that when in the course of his evangelistic work Jesus came to his home town, Nazareth, the town's folk, deriding his claim to speak as a religious authority, said sneeringly: "Is not this the carpenter?" Justin Martyr describes Jesus as a *tecton*, and informs us he made plows and ox yokes. The statement of *Mark*, which biblical scholars agree was that of the original narrative, was modified by *Matthew* who, evidently thinking it unseemly that the Messiah should ever have earned his living by hard honest work, transmuted the comment of the people of Nazareth into: "Is not this the carpenter's son?" It is, of course, not improbable that in becoming a carpenter Jesus was merely following in the footsteps of his father, and tradition tells some marvellous tales of how Jesus, when but an infant, aided in Joseph's carpentry work. One such story is that Joseph, filling an order for a couch, six cubits long, sawed off two lengths of wood for the sides but made one too short and grieved over his mistake. Whereupon the child Jesus seized hold of one end of the plank and persuading his father to hold the other end, stretched the wood to the requisite length. Naturally we cannot accept this tale, and we must likewise reject the story of how Jesus, while

assisting a neighbor, Salem, the dyer, threw all the pieces to be dyed into the same vat of dye and yet drew forth each cloth dyed a different color and to precisely the shade desired by the customer. And fortunately we can, by parity of reasoning, refuse to believe that the boy Jesus struck his little playmates dead whenever they crossed him, though a number of such deaths inflicted by the petulant progeny of God are recorded by the apocryphal gospels, gospels which can hardly have been written by men with a lower standard of veracity than that of the authors and redactors of the canonical writings.

Joseph, whatever trade he may have followed, no longer figured in the annals of the family when his son entered public life, and we may reasonably assume that part of the earnings of Jesus the carpenter were devoted to the support of a widowed mother to say nothing of several unmarried sisters. At all events, towards his late twenties Jesus threw aside his carpenter's tools, left Nazareth, and became an itinerant evangelist. He "got religion" as we would now say, through John the Baptist who was then strenuously carrying on a religious revival and immersing his converts in the Jordan. This remarkable man, we are told was "clothed with camel's hair and had a leathern girdle about his loins, and did eat locusts and wild honey." He "baptised in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins." According to Josephus, John admonished the Jews to practice virtue and justice towards one another and piety towards God. He gave them to understand that baptism alone would avail them nothing, that it could not in itself wash their sins away, but would be acceptable to God only if their souls had been cleansed beforehand by righteousness. To baptise persons who were Jews by birth was an innovation, the accepted doctrine being that this rite was necessary only for proselytes from paganism, who were by baptism admitted within the Jewish fold. The contention of John that the Jews themselves were in as much need of baptism as the pagan proselytes would naturally be controverted, and among the audience of John were scoffers as well as seekers. It was evidently to the people on the scoffers' bench that he addressed the words: "Ye offspring of vipers! Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come!", though, as the scoffers were certainly not there in obedience to any warning of this description, we could

hardly go wrong in supposing what was really said to have been: "Who can make you heed the warning of the wrath to come!" The remaining words of the alleged address of John are more plausible. Those who hung back from repentance and baptism on account of their faith, that being of the Jewish race gave them sufficient merit in the eyes of God, might well have been told by John to "bring forth fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say to yourselves: 'We have Abraham to our father' for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham", a warning that if the Jews did not follow the dictates of God, as voiced by John, the Deity might perhaps look elsewhere for a "chosen people."

The work of John, it would seem, found scant sympathy among the more cultured classes. The "chief priests and the scribes and the elders" would not accept his teachings. But the common herd, "the people", "the multitude", regarded him as a heaven-sent prophet. And "there went out unto him all the country of Judea, and all they of Jerusalem, and they were baptised of him in the river Jordan confessing their sins." It would seem that some of his admirers regarded John the Baptist as Elijah sent back to earth again; at all events this view was taken by Jesus of Nazareth as we learn from *Matthew*, xi, 14 "this [John the Baptist] is Elijah" and xvii, 12-14 "I say unto you that Elijah is come already and they knew him not. . . . Then understood the disciples that he spoke unto them of John the Baptist." The fourth gospel (I, 21) however gives us to understand that John the Baptist declined having this honor thrust upon him, and when asked "Art thou Elijah?" replied flatly "I am not." Jesus and John are thus, according to the Bible, in flagrant contradiction upon this point, and the orthodox harmonizers have never succeeded in effecting a reconciliation.

John appears to have laid down a fixed formula of prayer, since *Luke* records that the origin of the Lord's Prayer was a request on the part of one of the disciples of Jesus: "Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples." Fasting as well as praying he enjoined, "The disciples of John fast often and make supplications; likewise also the Pharisees." This however failed to conciliate his enemies: "John the Baptist is come eating no bread nor drinking wine; and ye say he hath a devil" declared Jesus. John urged his hearers to care for their impoverished fel-

low citizens, saying "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath food let him do likewise." He admonished the tax collectors to exact no more than was due, and the soldiers who came under his influence were told to do no violence to any man, to accuse no one wrongfully, and to be content with their lawful gains.

That the influence of John should extend to the very soldiers of the government could not but arouse the anxiety of the authorities. And the words attributes to John "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" "Even now is the axe laid unto the root of the trees; every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire" might easily be interpreted as a public declaration of John's intention to interfere with the affairs of the government and force some much needed reforms. Add to this the fact that John was sometimes looked upon as Elijah returned once more to Israel: Elijah, who it was believed would return to herald the restoration of the Jewish nation to the independence and glory it possessed under David, and we cannot be surprised to learn that the career of John the Baptist was cut short by his arrest and execution at the order of Herod Antipas, the ruler of Peraea and Galilee, who tradition says also put to death John's father, Zacharias. Josephus gives the story as follows: "Because men flocked to him [John], for they took the greatest pleasure in listening to his words, Herod took fright and apprehended that his vast influence over people would lead to some outbreak of rebellion. For it looked as if they would follow his advice in all they did, and he came to the conclusion that far the best course was, before any revolution was started by him, to anticipate it by destroying him; otherwise the upheaval would come and plunge him into trouble and remorse. So John fell a victim to Herod's suspicions, was bound and sent to the fortress of Macherus, . . . and there put to death." One objection which has been raised to this account is that Macherus, being either in the possession of Aretas, the father in law of Herod Antipas and his enemy or on the border between the domains of the two princes, could hardly be a suitable place for the confinement of a dangerous agitator. This argument however is based on the assumption that Herod at first merely held John prisoner and only ultimately decided to have him killed. An imprisonment of some length is in-

deed a part of the gospel story, but intrinsically it is far more probable that Herod, sending John to a remote spot where no local commotion would be caused by his execution had him quickly put to death. According to *Mark*, Herod "sent forth and laid hold on John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. For John said unto Herod: it is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." We know however from Josephus that Herodias was not the wife of the tetrarch Philip but his mother in law. For she was originally married to another son of Herod the Great (by Mariamme, daughter of Simon) thus being before her divorce the wife of the half-brother of Herod Antipas, and it was Salome, the daughter of this first marriage, who became the wife of Philip. To obviate this difficulty and save the credit of the gospel authors the curious stand has been taken that, since we may not suppose *Mark* and *Matthew* were in error, we must assume that Herod the Great had two sons named Philip. And this notwithstanding the fact that Josephus gives a list of the children of Herod the Great and only one Philip appears among them! At all events the gospel narrative goes on to say: "And Herodias set herself against him [John] and desired to kill him; and she could not; for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous man and a holy, and kept him safe." That Herod Antipas should either fear John on account of his holiness or spare him on account of his righteousness is quite out of keeping with what we know of the character of this tetrarch, and *Matthew* is more plausible in telling us that Herod hesitated to execute John for the reason that he "feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet." Inveigled on his birthday by the dancing of Salome into promising to give his step-daughter whatever she might ask, which proved to be the head of John the Baptist, Herod Antipas was, we are informed, "exceeding sorry but for the sake of his oaths, and of them that sat at meat he did not reject her" and had John speedily beheaded and his head brought on a charger to Salome and her bloodthirsty mother who the gospels tell us had instigated the whole affair.

It is quite possible that John may have voiced his disapproval of the domestic affairs of his sovereign, but as has already been shown, there were other ways in which he had given umbrage to the government. It is noteworthy that all through the New Testa-

ment there is in constant evidence a desperate endeavor to exculpate Jesus and all those connected with him of any suspicion of opposition to the constituted authorities, and to such lengths is this pushed that an impartial reader must have grave doubts whether the story which makes Herodias and Salome responsible for the killing of John may not have been fabricated out of the whole cloth for the express purpose of obscuring the fact that John the Baptist was from the governmental point of view a dangerous incendiary. And this surmise is strengthened by the fact that anyone desiring to curry favor with the Romans would find Herodias an excellent scapegoat. In Roman annals she would appear as an enemy of the imperial authorities, since it was Herodias who incited her husband to those political intrigues that brought about the deposition of Herod Antipas from his tetrarchy and his banishment to Gaul where he and Herodias passed the remainder of their lives under the suspicious eyes of the Roman government.

The gospel writers would have us believe that John regarded himself as a mere forerunner of a much greater prophet and was continually impressing upon his hearers how subordinate his own role was. He is quoted as having said: "There cometh after me he that is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I baptised you with water; but he shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost." (*Mark*, i. 7-8). Even more emphatic are the words cited by *Matthew*: "I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire; whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor, and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff will he burn up with unquenchable fire."

It is obvious that this description of a Messiah who shall come, fire in hand, to regenerate the world and bring about a Millenium by separating the wheat of humanity from the chaff, by no means fits the person of Jesus of Nazareth who instead of sitting in judgment was given a place in the dock, and himself judged, condemned and executed by the constituted authorities of Palestine. Orthodox Christians hence have to regard the alleged statements of John as predictions of what will happen at the long-deferred second coming of Christ. The predicted "baptism with the Holy Ghost" is

indeed supposed to have been realized, yet strangely enough not by Jesus himself but by his apostolic successors (see *Acts* xix 1-7, xi, 15-16). This baptism, effectuated by the laying on of hands, was marked by "prophesying" and such charismatic gifts as "speaking in tongues," exemplified in the doings of the famous day of Pentecost (see *Acts*, ii, 1-4). Certain Christians of the present day claim still to have at their command "baptism by the Holy Ghost," and claim to duplicate at their services the speaking in tongues and other marvellous doings of apostolic times, a claim that an unprejudiced student of the subject must regard as by no means without foundation.¹ But the more conservative Christians of today are inclined to disdain the alleged ministrations of the Holy Ghost and to stigmatise those who accept them as "Holy Rollers."

Not only is there difficulty in making the career of Jesus fit into the alleged predictions of John: there is also good reason to doubt whether the latter ever did make announcement of the imminent coming of a Messiah or even of a prophet greater than himself. A cogent argument for this doubt can even be found in the canonical gospels. For we are told that when after the execution of John the Baptist the fame of Jesus began to spread, speculation was rife as to his identity. Yet at this juncture no one recalled that a prediction had been made by John of the impending coming of a greater prophet. There were those indeed who regarded Jesus as Elijah or Jeremiah or another ancient prophet brought back to earth once more, and others who regarded him as an entirely new prophet. But none said he was the fulfilment of the announcements of John the precursor. Some thought Jesus was John the Baptist himself come back to life, and according to *Mark* and *Matthew* even Herod Antipas, who was presumably well informed as to just what John had been preaching, took this view, saying: "John whom I beheaded is risen." And parenthetically we may remark that the nonchalant way in which certain persons in Palestine seem to have accepted as credible the report that John, after being beheaded, had come back to resume his preaching, shows of just what value even a wide-spread belief in the resurrection of Jesus would be as evidence of it having actually taken place.

John the Baptist, as we have seen, stressed in his preaching the

¹ An account of what takes place in our own time under the alleged inspiration of the Holy Ghost will be found in an article by the present writer, "Pentecostal Prophets" in *The Open Court* for November, 1928.

necessity of repentance, and unquestionably the state of mind of those who heeded his words and submitted themselves to be baptised was quite similar to that of a person who is "saved" at a modern religious revival by coming forward at the call of the evangelist to kneel before the altar and avow himself a miserable sinner. It has always been a stumbling block for the orthodox Christians that Jesus, the Messiah, should have acquired a conviction of his own sinfulness under the preachings of John the Baptist, and humbly crept forward, proclaiming his repentance and begging for baptism. And to obviate this the author of the *Histoire de saint Jean-Baptiste attribuee a Saint Marc l'evangeliste* (published in *Patrologia Orientalis*, Tome IV, Fasc. 5) tells how the angel Gabriel came to John who was sojourning in the desert, and transmitted to him the command of God to leave this desolate region and go to inhabited parts and baptise all who should come to repentance. "My own son" the message said "will go to find thee and be baptised by thee to sanctify the water, and all who follow will be sanctified in it." The *Nazarene Gospel according to the Hebrews* narrates that the mother of the Lord and his brothers said unto him. "John the Baptist baptiseth unto the remission of sins; let us go and be baptised of him." But he said unto them: "Wherein have I sinned that I should go and be baptised of him unless perchance this very thing that I have said is a sin of ignorance?" Finally however Jesus consented to go, and the ceremony took place. "It came to pass that when the Lord ascended out of the water that the whole fountain [fons] of the Holy Ghost came down, rested over him and said "My son, in all the prophets I awaited thee that thou shouldst come, and I might rest upon thee. For thou art my resting place. Thou art my first born son. Thou art king for evermore." *Mark* however merely says that "It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised of John in the Jordan. And straightway coming out of the water he saw the heavens rent asunder, and the Spirit as a dove descending upon him, and a voice came out of the heavens, Thou art my beloved son, in thee am I well pleased." *Matthew* would have us believe that John recognized his own unworthiness to baptise the man from Nazareth. "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan unto John to be baptised of him. But John would have hindered him, saying, I have need to be baptised of thee, and cometh thou to me? But Jesus

answering said unto him. Suffer it now, for thus it becometh to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffereth him." *John* is still more explicit and informs us that, at the baptism of Jesus, John the Baptist proclaimed that here was the one who would come after him and baptise with the Holy Ghost, and testified that Jesus was the "Son of God" and "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Indeed according to this fourth gospel, John the Baptist came into the world for one sole purpose: to bear witness to Jesus.

The alleged recognition by John of the Messianic rank of Jesus at baptism is accepted without a question by the more orthodox Churchmen who do not even perceive how inconsistent this is with the story that later on, during the imprisonment of the Baptist, "when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent by his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?" We are told that in reply Jesus set forth his claims to be recognized as "he that cometh" in no uncertain terms, but without any reminder that the recognition had long ago been given. We are given to understand that on this occasion a number of publicans and other of the multitude who had previously been baptised with the baptism of John accepted Jesus as their new leader. But we are left in ignorance of the attitude finally taken by John himself and his more intimate disciples. To arrive at the truth in this matter we must evidently look beyond the gospels that the Church has edited and expurgated for the benefit of the faithful. One extra-canonical source of information is afforded by the *Recognitions* and *Homilies* that were erroneously attributed to Clement of Rome. These Pseudo-Clementine writings are derived from certain heretical works that the Church thought fit to suppress, and in them is a vivid picture of ardent disciples of John the Baptist who utterly deny the supremacy of Jesus over their master and debate the question with the apostles. Peter is here quoted as making the accusation that certain Jews "being baptised by John and holding the word of truth received from the tradition of Moses as the key of the kingdom of heaven, have had it from the hearing of the people. Yea, some even of the disciples of John who seemed to be great ones, have separated themselves from the people, and proclaimed their own master as the Christ." It would seem that in argument with the Christians the disciples of the Baptist were in

the habit of making use of the celebrated saying of Jesus given by *Matthæw* xi. 11-12, (*cf. Luke* VII, 28) "Verily I say unto you. Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist." For Peter narrates that in one of the controversies that took place after the death of Christ "Behold one of the disciples of John asserted that John was the Christ, and not Jesus, inasmuch as Jesus himself declared that John was greater than all men and all prophets. 'If then,' said he, 'he is greater than all, he must be held to be greater than Moses and than Jesus himself. But if he be the greatest of all, then must he be the Christ.' To this Simon the Canaanite, answering asserted that John was indeed greater than all the prophets, and all who are born of women, yet that he is not greater than the Son of Man.² Accordingly Jesus is also the Christ, whereas John is only a prophet." Evidently the answer of Simon does not meet the argument at all unless he be understood to take the ground that Jesus was not born of a woman, a doctrine that was in fact held by the Docetists who contended that the body of Jesus instead of being flesh and blood was a phantom and thus his apparent birth from Mary was merely an illusion. But the Christians who would take this position were very few, and evidently it involves rejecting the authenticity of much of the accepted gospels: The saying of Jesus concerning John the Baptist is very probably authentic since none of his followers would willingly have put it in the mouth of the Master. But it may very well have been detached from its original context and put in absurd juxtaposition to an account of Jesus making claim of superior rank for himself. In all probability the statement belongs to an earlier stage in the career of the Prophet of Nazareth when he had not yet acquired a Messianic consciousness and had no thought of ranking himself above the man whose eloquence had brought him to repent of his sins and had turned his thoughts towards religion.

Evidently the significance of the passage in the Pseudo-Clementines is not dependent on any theory as to the authenticity of what it relates. Be the story true or false we may be certain that he who wrote it was not setting up a man of straw as opponent of Christianity, and that at the time it was penned there must have been very much in evidence a body of believers who upheld the claims of John the Baptist while denying those of Jesus. And as a matter of fact

² The whole argument shows that what Jesus really said was: "Among them that have been born of women the greatest is John the Baptist."

such a religious body exists even at the present day in the Sabians (Baptists) more commonly known as Mandaeans (that is, Gnostics or those good at knowing) of Mesopotamia. Adherents of this interesting faith are to be found particularly on the lower Euphrates and Tigris, but a small colony exists in almost every town except probably the Holy Cities of the Shiah Mohammedans, Nejeif and Kerbela. It was roughly estimated in 1924 that their numbers totalled about ten thousand. Formerly they were however much more numerous, and it is said that when Mesopotamia was under Abbasid rule the Mandaeans had there four hundred places of worship. They are generally artificers or tradesmen, skillful and hard-working, and almost monopolize the making of the *mashhufs* or shallow bitumen-coated boats used on the marshes of the Tigris and Euphrates. The workers in silver and gold of a Mesopotamian town will frequently be found to be Mandaeans, and they are reputed to turn out very artistic wares. Physically they are a tall well-built race and their women are usually handsome. In Saq-esh-Shuyukh they have a temple through which courses a rivulet, but edifices are not essential in their religion which merely requires easy access to running water. With some of them bathing or "baptism" is practiced as a religious rite in the morning and evening of each day, while all of them "baptise" every Sunday and every feast day and the day preceding. Their religion tends not only to cleanliness of body but also to that of food, the proper washing of which is enjoined upon the faithful. The Mandaean religious literature is in an Aramaic dialect which developed in lower Babylonia, but the local Arabic is what is usually spoken by the members of the sect.

While the Mandaeans exalt John the Baptist as their prophet, there is reason to believe that their religious lineage should not be traced to him alone. Distinctly Gnostic elements enter into their cosmology which is based upon the idea of creation by emanations. Persian dualism, somewhat on the order of Manichaeism is also in evidence in Mandaean theology. The Mandaeans keep Sunday as their day of rest, and there is no indication in their literature that they ever kept the Jewish Sabbath or practiced circumcision. They regard Moses as a false prophet, and contend that in his day the depositaries of true religion were the Egyptians. They have been persecuted from time to time, alike by Jews, Nestorian Christians

armed with the authority of the Sasanian monarchs, by Moham-medans and in modern times even by Roman Catholic missionaries. These Jesuits of Portugese nationality, settling at Basra in the sixteenth century, classed the Mandaeans, as "Christians of Saint John"—as descendants of the "Christians" baptised only with the "baptism of John"—and succeeded in getting the local pasha to adopt this view of their proper spiritual allegiance. The Mandaeans were, in consequence, ordered by the authorities to attend the Roman Catholic religious services or incur punishment by fines or bodily penalties. It is hence not surprising that a feeling of bitterness towards Christianity should be evinced in Mandaean literature, and that one maxim of the faith should be: "When he [Jesus] compels you to say: 'We are thine,' acknowledge him not in your hearts, and deny not the word of your Lord, the exalted King of Light. For hidden things are not known to the Lying Messiah." To these poor victims of "Christian" persecution Christ appeared in the light of a merciless fiend and to comfort the sufferers in their afflictions the exhortation was given out: "If he oppresses you and kills some of you, do not despair. He can kill only your bodies, and your souls will dwell in the world of light. Be ye not terrified, despair not, and have no fear of Christ." It would, however, be a mistake to assume that the later feelings of the Mendaean towards Christianity and its founder necessarily existed from the very beginning. Antagonism between those who fell away from the Baptist fold to follow Christ and those who remained true to the faith of John there must have been. But the bitter animosity shown in the Mandaean writings towards the Christian faith is probably largely a later growth.

The Mandaean tradition of the career of John the Baptist is preserved in the *Sidra d'Yahya or Book of John*.³ In this, as in the

³ Also called *The Discourses of the [Celestial] Kings*. A German translation: *Das Johannesbuch der Mandaer* by Mark Lidzbarski, was published in 1915. Portions of this were translated into English by G. R. S. Mead and published in *The Quest*, V.15, and later in book form as the *Sidra d'Yahya, the Gnostic John the Baptist, selections from the Mandaean John Book* (London, 1924). In 1925 appeared the translation of another important work edited by Lidzbarski: *Ginza, der Schatz oder das Grosse Buch der Mandaer*. In this also John appears on the scene, but we seek in vain in the Mandaean literature for a coherent story of the career of John the Baptist. These books tell us, not the history of John the Baptist, but rather the sentiments of his followers. Nothing is to be found about any arrest or execution of John. He dies, apparently in the ordinary way, and his soul ascends to heaven under the guidance of the *Manda d'Hayye*, i.e. the Gnosis of Life, or Life-giving Knowledge.

gospel story, the parents of John, Zacharias (Zakhria) and Elizabeth (Enishbai), are said to have been highly advanced in years at the time of his birth, the former, often referred to in the tale as "Old Father," being ninety-nine and the latter eighty-eight, these nominal figures probably having some symbolic significance. Preceding the birth of John a portentuous dream announced that some remarkable event is to take place. In the dream a star appeared and stood over Elizabeth, three heavenly lights flickered around Old Father Zacharias, fire burst out of the synagogue, smoke poured out of the temple. The sun was eclipsed, the earth quaked and a star fell to earth in Jerusalem. The sun shone by night and the moon appeared by day. The priest who had this dream hurried to the temple to announce that some dire calamity threatened Judaism. "He opened his mouth in blasphemy and his lips in lying," the chronicle says. When the other priests heard him they threw dust on their heads and wept, and Elizar, the High Priest, sought far and wide an interpreter of the dream. The ordinary priestly interpreters of dreams could make nothing of this one, but finally an interpreter was found who rose to the occasion and expounded the dream as follows: "Woe unto you, all ye priests, for Elizabeth shall bear a child. Woe unto you, ye rabbis, for a child shall be born in Jerusalem. Woe unto you, ye scribes, for Elizabeth shall bear a child. Woe unto thee, Mistress Torah [the Law] for John shall be born in Jerusalem." The Mandaeans, in fact, hold that John the Baptist was by no means an admirer of the puerilities of the Jewish Law, and had found in Gnosticism a much better path for his followers to tread.

Alarmed by the prediction that "John shall take possession of the Jordan and be called a prophet in Jerusalem," Elizar turned to Zacharias and said: "Old Father, depart from Judea, lest you cause strife in Jerusalem." In reply Zacharias denounced the stupidity of those who imagined a man of his age could become a father, and wound up by saying: "It is twenty-two years today since I have known woman. Not through me, not through Elizabeth, could a child be born!" He then left the temple, and as he walked away unearthly lights were seen hovering around "Old Father Zacharias" which confirmed the fears of the High Priest. In consequence the Jews were "filled with wicked anger" against Elizabeth and said to one another: "What weapon shall we make ready that the com-

ing one and his mother may be slain by our hands?" But their evil schemes were foiled by Enoch who, shortly after the birth of John, spirited away the babe and took it to Mount Parwan "on which sucklings and little children are reared on holy drink."

The Mandaean story of the baptism of Jesus is quite different from that of the Christian gospels. According to the former Jesus came to John and said: "John baptise me with thy baptism and utter over me the Name thy wont is to utter. If I distinguish myself as thy pupil I will remember thee in my writings. If I attest myself not as thy pupil, then wipe out my name from thy page." John, the story goes, was reluctant to baptise Jesus, the "liar" or "imposter" as the latter is usually termed by the Mandaeans. "Stinking fish is not a tasty morsel," he bluntly remarked. But Jesus urged him again and again, and finally a mandate came from heaven: "John, baptise the liar in the Jordan." And John proceeded to do so. The Holy Ghost which the Christians claim descended upon Jesus on this occasion duly puts in an appearance in the Mandaean story, bringing a cross, and causes a magnificent color display to appear on the waters of the Jordan. By Mandaeans the Holy Ghost is regarded as female and identified with Ruha, the mother of all evil spirits, her first born being Ur, the devil of Mandaean theology, who serves as sire for the rest of her offspring. It is interesting to note the parallelism between the Mandaean view of the Holy Ghost as feminine and that of certain heretical Christian writings which likewise make the Holy Ghost a female and describe her as the mother of Jesus. In Mandaean cosmology Ruha with her son Ur is depicted as dwelling on the surface of a watery expanse that preexisted at the beginning of creation, and it has been held that we may correlate Ruha with the female "spirit of God," which *Genesis*, I, 2, tells us was "brooding upon the face of the waters," and Ur with the light produced in one of the very first acts of creation in the *Genesis* story.

The Mandaeans claim that Jesus learned wisdom from John and then so distorted the teachings he had received as to nullify and falsify the revelations heaven had given to the Baptist. The fragments which the New Testament give us of the sayings of John and the recorded sayings of Jesus are indeed of much the same order, and it is probable that a large part of what Jesus taught was based on the teachings of John, just as today we find one evan-

gelist after another reiterating the thoughts of his predecessors, even the phraseology tending to become stereotyped. As to a distortion of the doctrines of John, that is another matter, and the blame for this should probably be cast on the "Christians" who, giving lip-service to Jesus have continually nullified and falsified the teachings of their own master.

In one passage Ruha is depicted as boasting of what she has accomplished in the way of deforming the rites which John imparted to Jesus and by implication the pure spiritual doctrines for which they stood. "The Jordan in which the Lying Messiah was baptised have I made into a font. The bread which he received have I made into a sacrament. The drink which he received have I made into a supper. The head-band which the Lying Messiah received have I made into a priest's hood. The staff which the Lying Messiah received have I made into a dung stick [crozier]." The thought here would seem to be that John, besides baptising his disciples, gave them bread and drink, put bands around their foreheads and staffs in their hands, and that his simple symbolism was in the Christian Church replaced by elaborate ecclesiastical mummary, the teachings which the ceremonies of John served to enforce meeting a like fate.

The Mandaean view of religion is quite different from that of Judaism and Christianity, its deviation being all for the good. The Hebrew doctrine of the Fall, in which knowledge is described as a forbidden fruit, is quite alien to the Gnostic thought that true religion begins when man acquires knowledge of good and evil, of truth and error. The bloody sacrifices of the Jews in the temple, the cutting the throats of poor helpless animals as an act pleasing to God, is given no condemnation in the New Testament; neither Jesus nor his apostles, nor Paul, nor the latter's disciples have ever a word to say against this beastly practice. The more moral Mandaeans, however, proudly boasted of their God, the King of Light, that "no victims are sacrificed before him." The Christian view that this world can never be anything but a vale of tears, a stage in existence which ought to be devoted to mortifying the flesh and preparing for death, is rejected by the healthy minded Mandaeans who do not even practice the fasting which the Christian scriptures attribute to John the Baptist. Into the follies of asceticism the Mandaeans thus do not fall, and they roundly denounced the celibacy

so highly extolled by the early Christians. According to their tradition John the Baptist said: "It would be pleasant to take a wife and delightful to have children," but for a time feared that if he had a family he might neglect his religious duties and forget the Lord. But this error was corrected by a message from heaven: "John, take a wife and found a family, and see that thou dost not let the world come to an end." As the Christian advocacy of perpetual virginity worked out it tended to make the kind and gentle, the thoughtful and the altruistic, pass away without leaving any progeny, the care of propagating the next generation being left to the least worthy specimens of the humanity, and no words are sufficiently strong to use in stigmatising this system and the false prophets who upheld it. And since the Mandaeans held Jesus responsible for the official doctrines of the so-called Christian Church we can understand why they put into the mouth of John addressing Jesus the words: "Thou hast lied to the Jews and deceived the priests. Thou hast cut off their seed from the men, and from the women bearing and being pregnant." Coming in contact with Christians the Mandaeans saw them worshipping a wooden cross, and this idolatry found no favor in their eyes. An eloquent passage well exhibits their sentiments. "Let me warn you, my brothers! Let me warn you, my beloved! Let me warn you of the God which the carpenter has joinered together. They [the Christians] lay it on the wall and then stand there and bow down before the block. If the carpenter has joinered together the God, who then has joinered together the carpenter?" The Mandaeans developed a theology more inspiring than either cross worship or Jewish monotheism. Too moral to take the position that "whatever is, is right," the only logical standpoint of anyone who believes in a single omnipotent God, they held to a lofty dualism which refused to ascribe to the God they worshipped the manifest evils which lay before their eyes. In nature they saw two supernatural kings, one to hate and oppose, the other to love and support. The King of this world "girt on a sword," they said, "and put on a crown of Darkness. A crown of Darkness he put on his head and took a sword in his right hand. A sword he took in his right hand; he stands there and slaughters his sons, and his sons slaughter one another. The King from outside the worlds set a crown of Light on his head. A crown of Light set he on his head, and took Truth in his hand. Truth in his right

hand he took, and he stands there and instructs his sons. He stands there and instructs his sons, and his sons instruct one another."

Just how far the early followers of John the Baptist advanced in their spiritual progress up from Judaism we have no means of ascertaining. We do know, however, that the hand of the persecutor fell heavily upon them. The Jewish authorities vowed "We will slay them and make Miryai scorned in Jerusalem." "Miryai" being the poetic personification of the religious body composed of the Jewish followers of John. And carrying out their threat "They split open their fellings and snared the doves in Jerusalem," i.e. they killed and imprisoned those who were taking part in the movement for reform. In consequence, forced to flee from their persecutors, the little flock emigrated to Mesopotamia where there now seems to have taken place an amalgamation with a larger body of religionists of somewhat similar sentiments from whom part of the Mandaeans doctrines may have been derived. Here for some time they found peace: "Miryai am I, a vine, a tree at the mouth of the Euphrates. The leaves of the tree are precious stones. The fruit of the tree is pearls. Blessed be the man who hath freed me from my fetters and planted me here. Miryai am I, a daughter of the King of Babel, a daughter of the mighty ruler of Jerusalem. The Jews bore me. The priests brought me up. My father went to the synagogue; my mother went to the [Jewish] temple. They charged me: 'Miryai, close thy inner door and bolt the bar. See that thou goest not forth unto the street.' But I, Miryai, heeded not what my mother did tell me, and harkened not to what my father did say. I opened the inner doors and the outer let I stand open. Out went I into the street and the sun of my Lord fell upon me. I would have gone to the synagogue, but my steps led me to the [Mandaean] Temple. I went in and found my brothers and sisters." Lidzbarski holds that Mandaeanism originated either in a heretical Jewish sect or in a Judaizing heathen community in or close to Palestine at an early date, and he even conjectures that it may have been transplanted to Mesopotamia before the downfall of the Jewish kingdom. In view of the various far-fetched theories that have been put forth concerning the lost tribes of Israel it is surprising that no one has as yet claimed this distinction for the original Mandaeans.

Of more importance, however, is the probable connection between the Essenes described by Josephus and the Mandaeans. These Essenes who subsequently disappear from the annals of Judaism leaving not the slightest trace of what became of them, already, in the time of Josephus, had a reverence for the sun, or the light streaming from it, cognate to the Mandaean worship of the King of Light. They practiced daily bathing in cold water as a religious duty, and in their general cleanliness and mode of life showed distinct Mandaean tendencies. It is true they were inclined to asceticism, just as John the Baptist himself (if we can rely on the New Testament account) was inclined to favor fasting. But subsequent generations of the same people might easily have outgrown this tendency. In fact even in the days of Josephus, growth away from asceticism was manifest. He tells us: "There is yet another order of Essenes, which while at one with the rest in its mode of life, customs, and regulations, differs from them in its views on marriage. They think that those who decline to marry cut off the chief function of life, the propagation of the race, and what is more, that, were all to adopt the same view, the whole race would very quickly die out." The view of these more advanced Essenes thus parallels the heavenly correction of John's original view concerning marriage as told in the Mandaean tradition. It seems highly probable that most of the Essenes were ultimately drawn into the Mandaean movement, and their consequent emigration to Mesopotamia affords a good explanation of the disappearance of this sect from Jewish history. Some authorities find traces of Mandaeanism in the references made to "the Hemerobaptists" (i.e. those who baptise daily) by the early Christian writers. An example of such references is the following passage from the Pseudo-Clementine *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*. "For even the Jewish nation had wicked heresies: for of them were the Sadducees. . . . and the Pharisees. . . . and the Masbotheans. . . . and the Hemerobaptists, who every day, unless they wash do not eat,—nay and unless they cleanse their beds and tables and platters and cups and seats, do not make use of any of them."⁴ Comparison of the passage with the account of Jewish

⁴ To appreciate the implied reproach here we must remember that the orthodox "Christians" of the time actually cherished filthiness as a virtue, and that when an ecclesiastical historian wished to bestow especial praise on some holy man he told his readers that the saint never took a bath from the day of his baptism to that of his death.

sects given by Josephus shows, however, these "Hemerobaptists" ought to be identified with the Essenes rather than with the Mandaeans, if indeed at this later time there really remained any distinction between the two.

Ultimately, it seems, overtures were made by the Jerusalem priests for a reconciliation with Judaism. Priests came to the mouth of the Euphrates to plead with Miryai. They appealed to her: "Leave the man who is not of thy dwelling place." But she replied: "Go! Go hence, ye who have bore false witness and lied about me." In Judaism, said Miryai, "there is naught for supporting the poor, naught to revive the tormented souls." Taunts were tried: "Look at Miryai! She has left Jewry and gone to make love with her Lord!" But Miryai replied: "Far be it from me to love him whom I have learned to hate! Far be it from me to hate him whom I have come to love! Far be it from me to hate my Lord, the Life-giving Knowledge, who is for me a helper and a guide from the region of darkness to the region of light! Dust in the mouths of the Jews! Ashes in the mouths of all priests! Thou hast won the victory Life-giving Knowledge and hath helped all thy friends to victory! And life is victorious!"