

THE CHRISTIAN SUNDAY.

BY THE EDITOR.

DR. William Weber claims in his instructive article on the "Origin and Observance of Sunday," that Sunday is a typical Christian festival, that it did not originate either among the Gentiles or the Jews but makes its appearance for the first time in Christian churches. It was not instituted by Christ, who with the Jews celebrated Sabbath and not Sunday; for Christ said "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

It is a Jewish idea to look upon the law as eternal, and this proposition is echoed by Jesus when he says (Luke xvi, 17): "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." Similar thoughts are expressed by Baruch (v. 1), by Josephus, (*Apion* II, 38), Philo (*Vita Mosis* II, 3), *Bereshit Rabba* (X, 1), *Midrash Kohelet* (LXXI, 4), and we must regard it as a well-known rabbinical doctrine which was endorsed by Jesus. Paul, however, broke away from Jewish traditions and looked upon the law as a purely temporary institution, which was to remain until it had been fulfilled at the coming of Christ.

It is true that Jesus was a Jew and meant to be a Jew, and there are sufficient indications in other passages which go far to prove that he had no idea of extending his religion to the Gentiles. He forbade his disciples when sending them out on a missionary trip to enter into Gentile or Samaritan cities, and he declared "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." He goes so far as to speak of the Gentiles as dogs, saying: "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs."

Christ's words in the story of the Samaritan woman are commonly interpreted to have been said merely to test her faith, but it is not improbable that the original story meant to prove the superiority of the Jew over the Gentile, and we have at any rate an instance in which Christ places himself, in the presence of his disciples, upon the religious standpoint of the Jew holding the Gentile in abhorrence, and while he acknowledges the faith of the Samaritan he by no means revokes his sentiments concerning the Gentiles.

The Jewish branch of the Christian Church continued in this separatist spirit until Paul, who was born and had grown up among the Gentiles, began to preach Christianity among the pagans. We may be sure that the passages in which Christ exhibited his Jewish spirit are genuine, for certainly they could not very well have been invented by Gentile Christians, and we know that the Jewish branch was soon regarded as a sect whom the Church no longer counted as genuine Christians.

We must bear in mind that the first quotation concerning the law contains two clauses, first, "till heaven and earth pass," and then "till all be fulfilled." The latter clause apparently alludes to the coming of Christ, of whom Paul said that he had fulfilled the law, and had redeemed us from the curse of the law. Accordingly, the latter clause, "till all be fulfilled," literally contradicts the first clause, "till heaven and earth pass," and I see no way of solving the difficulty except by considering the second clause as an interpolation made by a Gentile copyist, who saw at once that Christ's word contradicted the main tenet of Gentile Christianity which recognized the law merely as a "schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Gal. iii. 24) and would not have it continued as long as heaven and earth remained. But while inserting the substitution, "till all things be fulfilled," he forgot to cancel the first clause, "till heaven and earth pass," and so this passage teaches us of a great change which came over Christianity when through Paul's mission it spread to the Gentile world.

Whether the original Church at Jerusalem celebrated Sunday is more than doubtful. It is possible that they did but we have no positive evidence, and considering the Jewish spirit of St. Peter, it is not probable. Sunday was looked upon as the day of Christ's resurrection, but not until Paul; and Paul looked upon Sunday as the day of resurrection because it was Sunday, the day of the Lord. Christ predicted that he would rise after three days, which means on the fourth day; but Paul changed this tradition which in the New Testament is directly attributed to a prophecy of Jesus

himself, who said, "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Accordingly, if Jesus was crucified on Friday his resurrection ought to have taken place on Tuesday. Yet Sunday is celebrated as the Lord's day, and so Paul spoke of Christ having risen "on the third day," changing the chronology of an old tradition in favor of an established institution.

Dr. Weber thinks that the celebration of Sunday is exclusively Christian, but we can prove from the New Testament that Sunday was celebrated by the disciples of John, who in the Acts are briefly called "the Disciples." That these disciples were similar in their institutions to the primitive Christians can not be doubted, but they were not yet Christians. They had not yet accepted the burden of Paul's message, which was that Jesus was the Christ.

We read for instance in Acts xix. 1-4:

"And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

"And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.

"Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

These disciples celebrated Sunday, for we read further on:

"Upon the first day of the week, *when the disciples came together to break bread*, Paul preached unto them" (xx. 7).

The custom of breaking bread on the first day is here expressly attributed to the disciples, and not to the congregation founded by Paul. Paul, as he expressly states, was not an observer of days, and we must do violence to the words of the passage here quoted if we interpret it to mean that Paul had introduced the celebration of Sunday.

In order to appreciate the situation we must bear in mind that in the days of Paul there were a number of traveling teachers of different religions which, however, must have been very similar in their main doctrines. We read for instance in Acts xviii. 24-26:

"And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

"This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being

fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

"And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded to him the way of God more perfectly."

This same Apollos became a convert to Pauline Christianity through Aquila and Priscilla who "expounded unto him the ways of God more perfectly." The same passage continues:

"And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ."

Apollos had been "instructed in the way of the Lord," yet he knew nothing of Jesus, "knowing only the baptism of John." He became converted simply by understanding that the Lord was Jesus. By the Lord is understood Christ, and Christ means the saviour, the redeemer, the mediator between God and man. The Christ ideal existed at Paul's time and Paul's message consists in the proclamation that Jesus is the Christ.

Further indications that there were other sects like the Christians are to be found in the preachings of Simon Magus, who is said to have been a great power in Samaria.

But if Jesus did not introduce the observance of Sunday, and if Sunday was celebrated by the disciples of St. John, how shall we account for its origin? The answer that suggests itself first to this question would be that the sun and Lord were identified in certain religious circles. This is the case to a great extent among the Mithraists, and we have reason to believe that Sunday was kept in a similar way among the Mithraists as among the Christians. Such at least is the opinion of Cumont, the foremost authority on Mithraism, who says in his *Textes et monuments figurés*, Vol. I, p. 119, "*Dies solis* is evidently the most sacred of the week for the faithful of Mithraism, as well as Christianity," a statement which he repeats on page 325 where he says that "Each day of the week the planet which is sacred to it is incorporated in a special place in the crypt, and Sunday over which the sun presided was particularly sanctified." Saturday was not only celebrated by the Jews but also by many pagans, especially in Africa, as stated by Tertullian, *Apol.* XVI and *Ad Nationes*, 113.*

* See Schürer, *Gesch. d. jü. Volkes*, Vol. III, 124. Cf. Cumont, l. c., 119, Note 4.

Dr. Weber writes that he has found no indications of the celebration of Sunday among the Mithraists, and so we might as well assume that the Mithraists had accepted the celebration of Sunday from the Christians, as *vice versa*, because Mithraism as we know it is of a considerably later date, for it makes its appearance only in the first and second century of the Christian era. But it seems to me that this argument is not convincing, for Mithraism, though it changed considerably in its transmigration to Rome, is an old religion which preserves many ancient rites particularly of the Persians. We know that Judæa has been greatly influenced by the Persians since the time of Cyrus who appeared as a liberator of the Jews, and was called "the Messiah of the Lord" by Isaiah. Cyrus introduced Persian features into the worship of the temple of Jerusalem, as we are told by Esdras (vi. 23), who says that the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem was arranged according to the order of Cyrus, and in the same verse the institution of the eternal fire is especially mentioned.*

It is generally conceded that the doctrine of the angels as held by the late Jews, especially among the Essenes, is typically Persian, and many institutions of this pious sect are attributed to the same source. In fact it is not impossible that the name of the chief sect, Pharisee (פְּרוּשִׁים) is simply the word "Persian" (פֶּרְסִי).

The name *Perushim* does not occur in the Old Testament and is of late origin. It is popularly derived from פָּרַשׁ (*parash*) "to separate, discriminate, to be astride," in the sense of "ascetics" or "separatists," because they kept aloof from the impure who did not observe the law punctiliously; but this etymology has no more value than the etymology of Babel or of Yahveh.

Parashim (פְּרוּשִׁים) means cavalry or knights, meaning "men astride on horseback," and as well as interpreting the name Pharisee as "men that keep aloof" we might explain it as corresponding to the Roman class *equites*, the knights or noblemen, who in Athens are called ἵππεις or horsemen.

The two Hebrew sibilants ס and ש are frequently confused, and there are many words which are spelled either with ס or ש †

* This citation is made with reference to the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, as the English version does not contain the passage. The quotation can be found on page 483 of the *Vetus Testamentum Græce secundum septuaginta interpretes*... ed. Leander Van Ess. Leipsic: Tauchnitz. 1855.

† We quote from Gesenius the following instances: פָּעַס and פָּעַשׁ "annoyance"; מִשְׁבּוּחַ and מִשְׁבּוּחַ "thornbush"; שִׁבְּךָ and שִׁבְּךָ "to be interlaced." Further the Chaldee ס changes into ש in Hebrew, e. g. Chaldee סִאָּוֵר "leaven," Hebrew שִׁאָּוֵר; and Chaldee סְבַר "to expect," Hebrew שִׁבַּר.

But though the traditional explanation of the word is doubtful, we need not insist on the etymology of *Perushim* from Parsi, because it is a mere side issue and the main point is sufficiently established. The paramount influence of Persian views on post-Babylonian Judaism is nowhere doubted.

The ancient Babylonians had weeks of five days and weeks of seven days, and in the latter scheme the days were in regular rotation sacred to the gods of the seven planets.

How old the institution of the celebration of Sunday as the day of Mithras must be among the Persians and other worshipers of Mithras, appears from the fact that the day which corresponds to the Christian Sunday is represented in China by the character *mih* which has been traced back to word *mithras*, and says Mayers in *Chinese Reader's Manual*, part II, p. 358, concerning these Mithras days.

"They are further explicitly declared, in the imperial manual of astrology, to represent the days of the sun, 'called in the language of the West, *mih*, the ruler of joyful events.' The sound has been traced to the Persian *mitra* and other cognate sources; and there can be little doubt that the practice of marking the 'days of the sun' has crept into Chinese chronology from a Western quarter."[‡]

In the face of this evidence we can hardly doubt that the Mithraists celebrated Sunday at an early age, and that the Christians accepted the same day as the day of the Lord.

Saturday has been from the beginning a day of taboo, of fasting, of inactivity. Work was forbidden and it was generally deemed to be an unfortunate day that belonged to the gloomy god Saturn. This conception is more marked in its Babylonian than in its Jewish observance, but the Jewish way of celebrating Saturday still retains this feature of abstaining not only from labor but also from joyous entertainment.

The Christian Sunday was originally a day of joy; labor was not so much forbidden as deemed out of place because it was a day of feasting, of recreation, and the identification of Sunday with the Jewish Sabbath is of a very late origin having been introduced only in England and English speaking countries. It is foreign to Christianity on the European continent, and it has never been introduced into the Catholic churches except perhaps in this country where the influence of English views has made itself felt. In England they

[‡] For further reference see an article "On the Knowledge of a Weekly Sabbath in China," by Mr. A. Wylie, in *Chinese Recorder*, Foochow, June-July, 1871.

have gone so far as to call Sunday by the name Sabbath, a custom frequently still maintained in this country.

It is not probable that the celebration of Sunday was instituted to offset the Jewish Sabbath, for the character of the two days is different. Sunday was foreign to the Jews. To the young Church it was a new institution, and we have indications that some Jew-Christians celebrated both days, each in its own way, Saturday by the traditional fasting and abstaining from any labor, and Sunday by a rejoicing in the Lord and breaking bread in common, implying a eucharist or love feast which united the whole congregation in a spirit of thanksgiving and prayer.