

## THE ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION AND THE BIBLE.

BY THE EDITOR.

EVERY pastor in the land should know the authoritative points as regards the great North-Medic religion which was spread at least from Ragha, Rai, near modern Teheran, about fifty miles from the southern point of the Caspian Sea, and probably from much further east, westward. It possessed such political importance that it gave its name to Adharbhagan, a province almost as large as England, on the southwest of the same sea, the mountain range Elburz having also a prominent place in Avesta under an older name. The word *Adhar* means "Fire" and refers to that element which was sacramental with the Persian Zoroastrians; from this came the exaggerated term "Fire-worshippers." In its sister-form this faith was the established religion of the Persian empire under Darius and his successors, and in all human probability under his predecessors as well. The North-Median form of it, Zoroastrianism, was "high church," so to express oneself for convenience; it was substantially the Exilic Pharisaism of the Jews. The South-Persian form was more "broad Church." Each was equally fervent, surpassing all other contemporaneous documents of their kind in this respect. It is impossible that any civilized people who had anything to do with the vast empire could have been ignorant of its main points; so the Greeks knew much about it, as we see.

The Jews were Persian subjects from Cyrus to Alexander; and the Exilic Bible, as many hold, is a half-North-Persian book;—see the dates from the reigns of the Persian kings, Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, Artaxerxes.

The Bible is fulsome in its allusions to them; see 2 Chronicles; see Ezra, Nehemiah; Isaiah xlv, xlv, etc., etc.

The Bible does not so much mention the North-Persian religion as it adopts it. This view is held by most scholars who can speak

with authority, and is an assured conclusion from the researches of A. V. Williams Jackson of Columbia University, New York; of Franz Cumont of Ghent; his countryman Count d'Alviella of Brussels, and especially Professor Lawrence H. Mills of Oxford, England.

It will be of interest to our readers to learn that Professor Haeckel, the great scientist, has lately re-affirmed the theory that our religion ultimately came from the Exile. To put the claims of the criticism in a nutshell: "We are actually what we are, as Orthodox Christians, because of this wide-spread North-Persian system."

We read in the first book of Esdras (vi. 24) that "in the first year of Cyrus, King Cyrus commanded to have the house of the Lord in Jerusalem built, where they should worship with eternal fire." The book of Esdras further states the woods and measures of the temple, and how the king had the gold and silver vessels which had been taken away by Nebuchadnezzar as spoils of war returned for temple service.

We can not doubt that Cyrus represented a reform movement in the Orient and that part of his success is due to the purity of his religious convictions. Not without good reason does Isaiah call him "the Messiah of Yahveh," and the "shepherd of the nations" whom God has called to rule over the world.

All the reports corroborate the theory that the religion of Cyrus was not only congenial to the Jews, but that it also influenced both their doctrines and ceremonials.

Professor Lawrence H. Mills has made a special study of Zoroaster and his religious system and has written a book which will be published in the near future. We predict that the significance of the Zendavesta in its relation to both the Old and the New Testaments, will be of increasing significance. Professor Mills writes in a letter to the editor: "The Jewish Bible surpasses the original Zendavesta only in the inspired genius of its depicments. Cold-blooded critics might well call the Gathas the purer book."

Professor Mills has given his instructive book *Zarathushtra, Philo, the Achæmenids and Israel* a formidable title, but it is written in easy style, and was for the most part delivered as University lectures. The author is however conservative as to the primary origin of the doctrines, holding that they were Jewish; but he exhaustively depicts the facts. Every Christian, not to say, every scholar, should read the book. It is the only one of the kind as yet attempted.