

SUNDAY AND THE RESURRECTION.

A LETTER TO THE EDITOR, WITH REPLY.

IN the June issue you argue for the Mithraic origin of the Christian Sunday. By citing two passages from the Book of Acts you seek to prove that the disciples of John the Baptist, as well as Christians, celebrated Sunday as their sacred day. First you quote Acts xix. 1-4. In this passage it is stated that Paul found some "disciples" in Ephesus that were followers of John, and persuaded them to be baptized again in the name of Jesus. "These disciples," you then say, "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)."

This reading is that of the King James Bible. But all the modern and critical versions or recensions that I have at hand, including the English and American Revised Versions and the Westcott and Hort Greek Testament, are unanimous for the reading, "When *we* (instead of 'the disciples') came together." Furthermore, the verse immediately preceding shows that this was not at Ephesus but at Troas, so that those who gathered together that Sunday morning for the breaking of bread, could not have been the disciples of John at Ephesus that are mentioned in xix. 4. These passages, then, do not indicate in the slightest degree, that John the Baptist's disciples observed Sunday. And it would be strange if they did, since they were a purely Jewish sect.

You are compelled by the logic of your position to say that the association of the Christian Sunday with the resurrection was an afterthought; and you think the resurrection "ought to have taken place on Tuesday," because Jesus is said to have predicted that he would rise after three days (Mk. ix. 31, x. 34.), and also to have said, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mt. xii.40).

I presume you do not regard these as genuine sayings of Jesus, but you think of them as growing out of a primitive tradition to the effect that Jesus rose on the fourth day, i. e., Tuesday. But if this were the earlier tradition, it would be strange that it left no more trace than this. It seems to me most likely that the words in Mark about rising after three days are based on a genuine saying of Jesus. As the Messianic hope commonly involved a belief in a general resurrection, and as Jesus believed the Kingdom was close at hand, it would not be at all strange for him to say that if his enemies put him to death he would rise in a short time. But why should he say, "after three days"? Because it was the popular belief, that the soul after death remained three days with the body, and then departed to Hades. So in a sense death was not quite complete till after three days. Jesus was simply expressing the faith of a psalmist, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades."

As to the passage in Matthew, I think it arose from a misconception. Jesus probably said that he was like Jonah in being a preacher of repentance, and he was afterwards misquoted as saying he was like him in being three days and nights in the heart of the earth. The inaccuracy would not trouble the average disciple more than Scriptural inconsistencies have usually troubled those who believe the Bible is throughout free from errors and contradictions.

All the Gospels except Matthew place the resurrection on Sunday morning. Matthew (xxviii. 1) places it at the close of the Sabbath, i. e., on Saturday evening. Paul, who you say changed the primitive tradition to bring the resurrection on the "Day of the Lord," i. e., Sunday, strangely enough does not name the day of the week on which Jesus rose. After stating that Christ died and was buried, he goes on to say that "he hath been raised on the third day" (1 Cor. xv. 3, 4). If, as the Gospels state, Jesus was crucified on Friday and buried about sunset, at which time a new day began according to Jewish reckoning, "the third day" might as fitly mean Monday as Sunday. Paul, so far as we know, never stated on what day of the week Jesus rose. It seems unlikely then, that he changed the tradition on this point.

If Jesus predicted that he would rise "after three days," the disciples would try to make these words and the event correspond. It was very easy to change the words "after three days" into "upon the third day" (1 Cor. xv. 4, Mt. xvi. 21, xvii. 23). But Matthew, as we have seen, declares that Jesus rose on Saturday evening. This may be the oldest and best tradition. However, Saturday evening is barely the third day from Friday evening; so the other

Gospels it would seem have ventured to stretch the time to early dawn of Sunday, and Mark has even gone so far as to say it was after sunrise when the women visited the tomb.

If then, the tradition has been changed as to the day of the week on which Jesus is said to have risen, that change must have been from Saturday night, not from Tuesday. Paul could not have been responsible for the change, but it must have come early among the immediate disciples of Jesus from recollection of his own words. If the day was not changed out of regard to the institution of the Lord's Day, then it is most likely that the Lord's Day was instituted out of regard to the resurrection, not imported from a foreign religion.

JOSEPH C. ALLEN.

EDITORIAL REPLY TO MR. ALLEN.

Mr. Allen is right with regard to the passages quoted, but we must nevertheless object to his statement that "the disciples of St. John the Baptist were a purely Jewish sect." The prevalence of Persian influence in Judea at the time of Christ is generally conceded, and since Jesus is reported to have been baptized by John the Baptist, we have good reason to assume that the Nazarenes so-called are but another name for the disciples of St. John the Baptist. The same is true of the Ebionites, which is a Hebrew term for "the poor," and it is probable that when Jesus speaks of "the poor," he refers, not in general to people in poverty, but to this definite sect, the Ebionites. We know that the Nazarenes on joining the sect surrendered all their property, which in the Gospels is called "giving to the poor," and held all things in common. Similar habits of a brotherly communism as well as of baptismal rites are told of the Essenes who lived in small colonies in several districts of Judea. The sectarian rules of all the people who go by these several names are so similar as to suggest the conclusion that they are simply different names of the same sect.

We have the best and most reliable information concerning the Essenes, who without question were a sect strongly influenced by Babylonio-Persian ideas. It is scarcely necessary to adduce any evidence because the fact is generally acknowledged by the best authorities, and we may be permitted for brevity's sake to quote the *Encyclopædia Biblia*, where A. G. Jülicher says:

"Lightfoot and Hilgenfeld have done well to suggest the possibility of Zoroastrian influences.

"The truth probably is that the Essenian doctrine of the soul (if Josephus can be trusted) combined two elements—a Babylonian and a Persian—both Hebraized.

"Persian and Babylonian influences may reasonably be admitted."—Vol. II, p. 1309.

Now if we grant that Sunday may have been celebrated by Persian Mithraists, it would be quite natural for the Essenes to observe the same day. Whether the Nazarenes, the Ebionites, and the disciples of St. John were simply kindred sects or but one sect under different names, it is not improbable that they would also have observed Sunday. None of these sects can be called purely Jewish any longer; all of them are more or less under Babylonio-Persian influence.

This Babylonio-Persian influence produced a peculiar kind of literature which has special reference to Messianic prophecies as to a renewal of the world after a day of judgment,—a peculiar kind of lore which is called eschatology, the doctrine of the last things. The eschatological literature of the Old Testament is apocryphal, but it is of great importance because it constitutes the transition from Judaism to Christianity. The Canon had been closed, and in the Canon there is already one book which contains eschatological prophecies; it is the Book of Daniel. All other eschatologies are as much filled with the spirit of Babylonio-Persian ideas, as the Book of Daniel, and the origin of Christianity could not be explained without them.

I have simply to refer to such books as the apocryphal books of Esdras, of Enoch, the revelations of Abraham and Moses, the Psalms of Solomon, etc.; and this leads me to another point which is raised by Mr. Allen,—the question of the day of resurrection.

Mr. Allen thinks that I shall be compelled by the logic of my position to say "that the association of the Christian Sunday with the resurrection was an afterthought," and "that the resurrection ought to have taken place on Tuesday." I must not have expressed myself clearly, for I meant to say that the doctrine of Christ's resurrection as having taken place on *Sunday* was a fore-determined proposition, and if the life of Christ had been a purely ideal construction, the crucifixion would have been fixed upon the preceding Wednesday.

The origin of Christianity is a product of several factors, among which the eschatological ideas of the time form a part and the

historical facts of Jesus another. The idea that the Christ should have stayed three days and a fraction in the domain of death is a favorite notion of the eschatological prophecies, and so, if there are any genuine sayings of Jesus at all, I believe that his prophecy of the "Son of man remaining three days and three nights in the belly of the earth" is original, and if not, the belief that it should be so is certainly an old and well-established tradition. If the passage had been of more recent date and if it had been written after the fixation of both the day of crucifixion and the day of resurrection, the Gospel writer would have modified his words to suit the occasion. In my opinion those passages which stand in flat contradiction to accepted Christian dogmas and established institutions, must be regarded as the most primitive parts of the gospels. So for instance, the prophecy of Christ "that there are some standing by who would not taste of death until the Son of man would come in all his glory" must have been written at the time when some of the disciples of Jesus were still alive. A later authority would certainly have changed the phrase so as to render another explanation possible, or would have omitted it altogether.

The expression "three days and a fraction" is nothing more or less than the number π , which represents any cyclical period. This same value, three and a fraction, occurs again and again in eschatological literature, and it was a common belief that the period between death and resurrection, the stay of Jonah in the whale's belly, and kindred events, should all be in cycles of three and a fraction.

Concerning St. Paul's statement of the resurrection,* I will say that there are two versions, one reads that Christ rose "after the third day," and the other "on the third day." I believe the former is the original. The latter is a later change which was made by a copyist who knew that the church festival of the crucifixion had been fixed on Friday and the resurrection on Sunday,—that is he adapted the reading by a slight modification to the established usage.

For further details I refer the reader to my article on "The Number π in Christian Prophecy," published in the July number of *The Monist*.

A similar criticism as that of Mr. Allen has been received from Dr. William Weber, who also calls attention to my erroneous appli-

* The words "Paul changed this tradition" is a mistake which somehow slipped into the copy of my manuscript. It does not express my views on the subject. I meant to say that since Paul many changes of the original traditions set in, and the fixation of the day of resurrection belongs to the post-Pauline period.

cation of the passages quoted from the Acts, and still insists in regarding my proposition unproved, that the Mithraists celebrated Sunday before the Christians, and that the "day of the Lord" originally means the day of the celebration of Mithras. He still insists that Sunday is a Christian institution, but if that were so I would have no explanation for the fact referred to in my former article that the first day of the week was called in the Chinese calendar the "day of Mithras" and the "day of the sun" of which Mayers says in his *Chinese Reader's Manual* "that it was called in the language of the West *Mi* [Mithras], the ruler of joyful events." The evidence may come from a distant country, but the more convincing it seems to me, and considering the great probability that the day of the sun is the same as the day of Mithras, I cannot help regarding the main points of my contention as unassailable.