

PROF. LAWRENCE H. MILLS ON "THE LOGOS."

BY THE EDITOR.

WE have repeatedly called attention to the great importance of Mazdaism, the religion of ancient Persia, founded by the great prophet Zarathushtra. It was perhaps the earliest clearly defined monotheism that was ever formulated as a definite faith with its sacred books, hymns and rituals, and it has exerted a greater influence upon our own religious development than was suspected, until the facts became known of late through scholarly research.

Prof. Lawrence H. Mills is one of the first and foremost students of the Zend and Pahlavi languages in which the sacred literature of Mazdaism has been written, and he has made accessible many important new facts that throw light on this ancient belief in Ahura Mazda, the Lord Omniscient, and the beneficent influence it exercised first on Judaism and later on Christianity.

There has been a controversy concerning the prevalence of Persian ideas in both Judaism and Christianity, and somehow the controversy has been raging concerning the origin of the term "Word" or *Logos* as used in the introductory verses of the Fourth Gospel. It is very peculiar that the same term *A'huna-Vairya*, or as it is more generally known in an abbreviation, *honover*, the divine word, is in the Zendavesta an omnipotent being that permeates the world, and is frequently spoken of as possessed of personality.

The well-known Orientalist Oppert was the first to declare that the *honover* was the prototype of the *Logos* idea of St. John, and this seems very plausible if we consider the mighty influence that the Persian religion had exercised on Judaism and Christianity. Now Professor Mills comes out with a vigorous protest in which he claims that the *Logos*-conception can not have been derived from Persian sources. This is the more noteworthy since Professor Mills is fearless enough to state what he deems to be true. He is not

influenced by any conservative, let alone ultra-conservative, tendency, and the arguments which he uses are plain enough.

Professor Mills sums them up as follows:

"I firmly refuse to accede to the view that Persian or Babylonian associations necessarily gave the first originating impulse to the new spiritual religious life of the Jewish tribes, holding, as I do, that it arose from the disciplinary effects of the afflictions of the people under their captivity, for this re-awakened and re-doubled their enthusiastic zeal for the cultivation of such of their ancient Scriptures as then still survived to them, and the more so as they were cut off from the more external consolations of their Temple service; but I have endeavored fully to recognize the immense *supervening influence* of the Medo-Persian creeds as corroborating the original Jewish thoughts in the chief all-important particulars, which were no less than Immortality itself with Resurrection, Forensic Judgment, Chiliasm, Paradise (by the way, a Persian word) Heaven and Hell; and to that opinion, as I need hardly say, I still adhere. Yet corroboration, firm support, co-operative coadjutation, vivication, expansion, wider promulgation, vitally influential as indeed these particulars are each and all severally supposed to be as elements of energetic force for the instilling of organic life into an incipient system, they are yet still not one of them *origination!*"

"In the same way I hold, as regards the *Hōnōver* containing, as it does, integral elements, in the imposing Medo-Persian scheme; for these elements, which are, however, not so very incisively expressed in this *Hōnōver*, may, indeed—nay, they must—have exerted more or less directly the same *supervening influence* in the progressive developments of the Exilic doctrine which the other ideal forces in the Avesta exerted upon it. And this is, of course, a matter of the gravest moment; but the proposal that the *Hōnōver* had anything directly to do with the point of the *Logos* in St. John's Gospel brings up an entirely separate question in the detail of the investigation, and one of a very marked and incisive character.

"If the *Hōnōver* materially and directly influenced that "Word which was in the beginning with God," then indeed we have a point of considerable magnitude in the history of the Christian religious philosophy, and many schools would become affected. But my argument to the contrary is of the shortest possible description. I will not urge that *Yasna XIX.* may have been written so late as a century or more after St. John's Introduction, as it is commentary matter, and may naturally be assigned to a later date; for we must

¹ Save as regards "Chiliasm" and "Paradise," which were wholly Persian.

also here postulate predecessors to both the Hōnōver and the *in principio*, as in regard to all similar compositions we are forced to do. And these forerunners of the Hōnōver may—if, indeed, they must not inevitably—have contained analogous expressions bearing also some likeness, through parallel development, to the *Logos* of Philo and St. John; but what I do emphatically urge as an absolute refutation of any direct influence of the Hōnōver upon the Philonian-Johanian *Logos*, as expressed in the Fourth Gospel, is the notorious fact that Philo's *Logos* was, in its scientific aspects, *entirely Greek*.

"Zeller, indeed, remarks that his—Philo's—*Logos* doctrine, that of the *in principio*, was "Jewish in a Greek dress," but perhaps that expression might be modified, though emanating from such an illustrious source. He—Philo—undoubtedly often reverted to such expressions as that "the heavens were made by the *Word of the Lord*, and all the hosts of them by the *breath of His mouth*;" but he endeavored to represent this "Word" as being analogous to the *Logos*, so that it seems difficult to see that his elaborately worked-up Greek *Logos* was a mere form of "foreign dress." Philo was always, of course, at heart passionately a Jew, and he wished to bring in all his literary results to bear upon the glory of his race in their inspired Scriptures,² and beyond all question fragments of the Persian lore reached him in his Greek Egypt through the Persian-Babylonian Talmuds as well as in the Exilic canonical Scriptures, which two were, each of them, doubtless much fuller in extent of literary matter than, at the time of Philo, than the masses of them which have till now survived to us of the present day. And these fragments doubtless contained many elements which appeared or reappeared in the Hōnōver, or in documents now lost, which were of similar description; and these must certainly have exercised a *supervening influence* upon Philo's mind, as well as upon that of every other individual present in Egypt or Jerusalem at the time, who at all concerned himself practically with such reflections.

"And to corroborate this we have only to turn to our Exilic Bibles, flooded as they are everywhere with Iranian ideas, and where we are especially arrested at the remarks about the "anointed Cyrus" and his Biblical successors; but that this Persian lore penetrated to him—Philo—in such force as to affect his *Logos* seems to me to be impossible. That anything Persian could have penetrated to the *Academia* to such a degree as to pointedly influence Plato's *Logos*

² Though Siegfried has approximately proved that he was rusty upon his Hebrew, having lived in an atmosphere of Greek (see *Philo von Alexandria als Ausleger des Alten Testaments*, 1875.

or *nous* is, of course, absurd,³ and that these analogous Iranian concepts came in upon Philo with such an effect as to mould his view of this, his Greek ideal, seems to me to be equally ridiculous. The man was not only attracted, but actually taken possession of, by his Athenian master. He could not even *think* Judaism without thinking Plato too, though we cannot bar the *vice versa*; and this was so notorious that it was common talk among the Greek Platonics for a century or more; they said (*Phot. Biblioth.*, lxxxvi, b. 26): Πλάτων φιλονίξει, ἢ Φίλων πλάτωνιζει."

The argument of Professor Mills is convincing. We can trace so plainly the Logos-conception of Philo to Platonism, that we are inclined to assume that we have here an independent parallelism which is perhaps more natural if we consider that a similar use of the term has been made among other nations, for instance in India. In China the word *tao*, which in so far as it also means "reason" (or the logical principle) is similar to the word "Logos," was also used by the Taoists in a quite analogous way to the term "Logos," and translators of the New Testament have accordingly translated the term "Logos" by "Tao."

Professor Mills's argument may be welcome as an orthodox interpretation of the New Testament, but we would suggest that the hyperorthodox position has become untenable under all circumstances, for what Professor Mills calls the "supervening influence" gave to Judaism its last touches and made it truly monotheistic, and if we need no longer trace the derivation of the term Logos from a so-called pagan people like the Persians, how is orthodoxy better off if instead of a Persian source we have a Greek source which is also pagan? The fact remains that Christianity is the product of a development, and that the early Christians have assimilated all those truths that powerfully appealed to their imagination. We have gradually learned not to be afraid of evolution, for evolution is the characteristic of life, and we understand more and more that evolution itself is a religious idea.

Professor Mills is a theologian, but he is a fearless investigator. He is neither a dogmatist nor is he a radical who would reject religion because it is a product of evolution. He is prominent as a scholar but he has also devoted much time and attention to philosophical and religious problems. We publish in the present number an article of his, entitled "God and the World Physical," in which he

³ For a detailed discussion of the entire question, see my book *Zarathushtra, Philo, the Achæmenids, and Israel*, Vol. I. The Open Court Publishing Co., Chicago.

harmonizes the problem of a conception of God with the rigidity of natural law. It will be noticed that his sympathetic study of the Zendavesta enables him to think his philosophical terms in two different religious terminologies, which is an advantage not to be underrated because it liberates the theologian from the dogmatic on-sidedness which seems to be a natural inheritance of every pious man.