

THE NAZARENES PRE-CHRISTIAN.

A VOICE FROM SCANDINAVIA.

BY WILLIAM BENJAMIN SMITH.

THE distinguished biblical scholar of Christiania, Norway, who has made New Testament criticism his debtor by a two-volume work on *Die Hauptparabeln Jesu*, Dr. Chr. A. Bugge, publishes in the current number of Preuschen's *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* (XIV, 2, 145-174) a searching monograph, "Zum Essäerproblem."

It is not intended to reproduce or even to summarize the elaborate discussion, but it seems worth while to call attention to the closing pages, as bearing on a question often mooted in *The Open Court* and originally started in *The Monist* (Jan. 1905, 23-45). On page 172 we read: "Regarding the appellation of these urban Esse(n)es, William Benjamin Smith, by his memoir on 'The Meaning of the Epithet Nazare(n)e,' has led me to a conjecture that I will ground here in the following pages." He then disclaims agreement with "W. B. Smith when he seeks to prove that the little city of Nazareth or Nazara did not exist at the time of Jesus." In view of later and far more definite results attained in *Eccē Deus* and in frequent discussions in *The Open Court*, this point seems to be of very minor importance.¹ Bugge then continues: "On the other hand I agree with W. B. Smith in the opinion that the epithet of Jesus, ὁ Ναζωραῖος, does not come from Nazara." He then quotes extensively from the memoir mentioned and on page 174 sums up the matter, thus:

¹A functionless Nazareth, a Nazareth that has nothing to do with Nazarene, is a matter of little interest. On the other hand, since the epithet Nazaree does *not* come from Nazareth, as is now conceded, from what does it come? Surely it did not drop down from the sky, and since it denotes a band of religionists, why not refer to the obvious stem *nazar* (keep, guard, conserve)? This indeed Bugge seems to do in equating *Nosrim* (Nazarenes) with *Therapeutae*.

“Let us try to attain clearness at this point: That *Jessaioi* is only a slight modification of *Essaioi*, is conceded so far as I know by all investigators; that therewith the etymology of Epiphanius collapses, will also be conceded. There remains then the fact that the Christians for a short time were called Esse(n)es, but along with the name Esse(n)es went the name Nazore(n)es. Hence the Christians in the very earliest times were called Esse(n)es or Nazore(n)es. This attests that these names were in some measure exchangeable, so that a similar significance was attached to the one and to the other. These Nazore(n)es could just as well be called Esse(n)es and were in fact called so alternatively. That must have been a fact that Epiphanius could not satisfactorily explain, despite all endeavor. Now one could explain the Nazarees from Nazara, as did Epiphanius. But if a connection between Esse(n)es and Nazore(n)es is present, then this connection was present before and independently of Jesus. If now we know that *Nosrim* really means *Θεραπευταί* [Curators] and furthermore that the Egyptian Esse(n)es were called Therapeutae, if finally Philo in explaining the name of the Palestinian Esse(n)es (Q. o. p. l.) calls these also *Therapeutae of God*, then is such an exchange of names, Esse(n)es and Nazore(n)es, very easy to understand. Therewith the distinction between Nasarees and Nazorees, which Epiphanius attempts, falls to the ground. The Nazorees (or Nasarees) are pre-Christian, they form a pre-Christian heresy or religious league, a league of brethren, which often and not without reason was identified with that of the Esse(n)es. Since Epiphanius says moreover that the Nazore(n)es were especially numerous in the Decapolis, the province next to Galilee, we may expect to find Nazore(n)es in Nazara before and after Christ. It is therefore not too bold to conclude that the “urban” Esse(n)es were actually called simply Nazarees, though also alternatively Esse(n)es, which corresponded quite to the actual state of case. So then the problem, so hard for Epiphanius, is solved, without leaving any contradiction or difficulty behind. The whole difficulty arises from deriving the epithet Nazore(n)e from the village of Nazareth. This derivation is the work of Matthew. But the whole narrative of the flight to Egypt and the consequent migration to Nazareth is entirely untrustworthy, because wholly irreconcilable with Luke ii. 39.”

Bugge might have added that “the whole narrative” of Luke is equally “untrustworthy, because wholly irreconcilable with” Matthew.

Our author has not drawn out the full train of consequences.

It would be interesting to pursue the matter still further, but we forbear. It is now nearly nine years since the derivation of Nazaree from Nazareth was challenged and the pre-Christianity of the Nazarenes maintained in the memoir laid before the Congress of Arts and Science, St. Louis, September 23, 1904. Meantime the positions then assumed have been repeatedly assailed from every point of the compass—with what avail let witness this article of Bugge and that of Bousset in the *Theol. Rundschau*, October, 1911. Amid all the dust of controversy, so much at least grows daily clearer, that critics must abandon the Matthean derivation of Nazoree from Nazareth, that they must concede the pre-Christian existence of the Nasarees, Nazarees, Nazorees, and that they must enlarge their theories so as to find place for all the corollaries that these concessions entail.

It is to be hoped that the Christianian will continue his interesting study.