THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GOD-IDEAL.

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THERE are a few remarks which I should like to make on the editorial article "Problems of Modern Theology," in the April number of The Open Court. I fully agree with Dr. Carus, that Christianity is a child of paganism, that is, as I look at it, a child which has first gone through the Jewish mould; for the more we study the Jewish literature of antiquity outside of the Old and New Testaments, i. e., the apocryphal, apocalyptic, talmudic, targumic writings, etc., the more we see that Paul and other writers of the New Testament found all the main ideas, which go to make up the dogmatic Christianity of the New Testament ready made for them, to which they may be said to have given the finishing touches, and which ideas they brought in connection with the person of Jesus. In my estimation the extra-canonical Jewish writings are yet too little studied in regard to the light they may throw on the natural origin of Christianity. If even the Old Testament shows enough traces of pagan influences and the way the Jewish religion assimilated them, the extra-canonical writings, generally so little known, perhaps show such influences plainer yet in regard to preparing Christianity, since they stand nearer to it in time. But my main point is this. Dr. Carus closes his article with the words: "The ideal is above time and space, and whatever may happen to our historical traditions, our main concern in the future development of Christianity should be that we do not lose the ideal that has guided us so far. We may even purify the ideal and cleanse it of the pagan excretions which are still clinging to the so-called orthodox Christianity." Perhaps the matter is not clear enough to me yet, but I would like to ask: What will remain of the ideal after purifying and cleansing it of its pagan excretions? For the Christ-idea is essentially at bottom this: It is the conception of a super-human personality, who is to restore the whole creation and mankind physically and morally to
its previous bliss and perfection, which it had at the beginning in the so-called Golden Age or Edenic state, as conceived in antiquity. This surely is the cardinal thought of the Christ-idea, based upon the general gloomy, pessimistic conception of antiquity concerning this world of ours. Now we know that there is no necessity of such a restoration, for there never was a Golden Age, nor a fall, which brought about the total depravity for all, physical death and natural evils,—views intimately connected with the Christ-idea and the premises upon which this idea is built. According to science we believe in the rise and evolution of mankind instead of its fall and retrogression. What then remains of the Christ-idea, if there was no necessity of a Saviour? Perhaps the ideal of moral perfection as conceived in a so-called God-man? But this isn’t surely the main idea in the Christ-conception. An ideal of moral perfection, I grant, is necessary, but is it necessary to conceive it under the mythical conception of a God-man? All ancient moral teachers, including Jesus, do not think so, and when demanding that man should strive to be perfect, place before him God alone as an example to follow. They say, we should be imitators of God, be perfect as he is perfect, be beneficent as he is, be forgiving as he is, etc.* Of course God is conceived in an anthropomorphic way, but nevertheless he is not conceived as a God-man. I do not see any necessity of an ideal of moral perfection but that accepted by the moral teachers of all religions, i. e., God, and if we put up another ideal in the conception of a God-man, as taught in Christianity, implicitly claiming thereby the superiority of Christianity, this will perhaps be rather a hindrance in the way of the formation of a universal religion and bringing together the different beliefs of humanity. I think if we need an eternal ideal, and we do need it, we might just as well conceive this ideal in God alone, instead of conceiving it in the metaphysical and theological hybrid of a God-man, who upon close analysis is after all nothing but God pure and simple, at least as far as I can understand. For what are all such terms as the ancient Hindu Vāch (voice, word), the consort of the Creator while creating, similar to the sophia in Prov. viii, dwelling with God in the beginning; the logos of Grecian, Philonian and Christian philosophy, the Targumic Memra, the Vohu-Mano (the Good Mind) "the son of Ahura Mazda," but a playing with words, personifying God, or the divine reason and law, as manifesting itself in the world? In fact, I do not

*Thus Plato in his conception of virtue (διωσθαι τῳ θεῷ), Seneca in many places; Lao-tze, if I am right, also often mentions the heavenly standard as the example to be followed, and others.
see any difference between God and the God-man, who was with God from eternity according to the metaphysical phraseology. To me, God set before man as the eternal ideal to be followed, seems far more simple and direct than the ideal of the God-man, especially when we can not think of the God-man but in connection with the historical Jesus, who was not perfect, as he himself stated.

I may not clearly see the matter, but it seems to me that in the future development of religion, not of Christianity (for Christianity is to me, scientifically considered, dead) it would be better if things would be more simplified and freed entirely from metaphysical and mythical conceptions. The Church throughout its history has always laid so much stress on the God-man idea as the most vital point in religion, that in consequence of its disputes and wranglings thereover very often ending in bloodshed, it has strayed away very far from the God-ideal as laid down to be followed in the precepts of the Sermon on the mount, the simple parables of Jesus on brotherly love and forgiveness, and the maxims of other ancient teachers.