

The Mysterious Apocrypha *Historical Data and the Occult*

THE APOCRYPHAL BOOKS of Hebrew and Christian Scriptures have always come in for a goodly enthusiasm on the part of students of the occult because it is supposed that these books were rejected by the orthodox churches on account of their esoteric content. And indeed, that is true of many of them, though not of all. The true esoteric documents have almost completely disappeared; fragments alone remain, drawn largely from that class of writings which we may call Gnostic, from *Gnosis*, meaning wisdom.

The documents known as the Apocrypha proper are limited in number, being those which were at one time accepted and used in Christian churches as authentic Scriptures, along with the numerous Books comprising the Old and New Testaments as we have them today. The Douay Version of the Bible still, to this day, includes the Old Testament Apocrypha, but they are not to be found in the King James Version.

The few sketchy Gnostic documents which remain to us are fragments of official texts of Gnostic societies or orders. These contained as much of the Mystery Teachings as could be given publicly, and they were full of mystical allusions to esoteric doctrines known in their fullness only to the elect. The Gnostic books include much that orthodox Christians would call "heathen" doctrines: Greek philosophy, Persian Christology, Chaldean star lore and doctrine of emanations, Egyptian magic, and so on—all interblended with Biblical elements. Many, if not most, of the Christian Gnostic documents naturally come from the communities of *Gentile* Christians; but many

more are of Jewish Christian origin as well.

Gnosticism has been defined as the active Hellenization of Judaism. Certainly Philo Judeus was a Hellenist. So also was Jesus of Nazareth. But it must be remembered that Hellenic culture included Oriental and Egyptian elements dating from earliest times in Greece, but especially from the conquests of Alexander the Great. Philo Judeus declared that all the wisdom of the Greeks could be found in the Hebrew Scriptures, a statement challenged by modern scholars, but which esotericists know is the simple truth. But Philo was referring to certain secret writings to which he, as a Therapeutic, had access, and not to the orthodox canon *alone*, although he was free to mention only the latter. It is well known that the Therapeutae and Essenes were custodians of the Secret Tradition of Israel, and possessed many books not known to the general multitude.

In the Christian era St. Peter and the Church at Rome came to represent the written tradition of what we may today call the Fundamentalist Faith, *Pistis*; hence it became increasingly materialistic, and in three short centuries separated itself, as a hierarchical Church, from the esoteric Fellowship, although Jesus continued to work upon it from within the Veil, succeeding in every century in influencing a few spiritual natures here and there.

It was the Gnostic movement, looking to St. John, which carried on the true esoteric tradition, the Secret Doctrine of Christianity, espousing Knowledge, *Gnosis* or *Sophia*, as against the Faith (*Pistis*) of the fundamentalist group led by Rome. The Bishop at Rome was not then the Pope and head of the Church officially, but he did occupy the

most important post in the ecclesiastical empire, and the rest of the Church looked to him for leadership. But the followers of St. John have never recognized the authority of St. Peter, and St. John is recognized as the Great Apostle of Gnosticism. This left-wing Christianity openly referred its origin to the Serpent Wisdom, and attracted into its fold all the intellectuals of the Christian world. It was Gnosticism, and not the reactionary group centered in Rome, which actually “conquered” paganism by assimilating it into itself. Gnostics accepted the canonical Gospel of John, but they also had an apocryphal Gospel of John of their own. The only remaining fragment of this apocryphal Gospel has come down to us through the Manicheans, who absorbed not only Mithraism but Gnosticism as well, when the Greco-Roman civilization fell. In our own Bible the Gospel of John is symbolized by Scorpio, and St. John is shown in sacred art blessing a little winged serpent which rises up in a wine cup, obviously a glyph of Gnostic attainment.

The Gnostics therefore looked not to Rome and a *static* tradition, but to the Invisible Church, and to the Risen Christ Himself. Thus every man might become his own priest and his own pope without being dependent upon any intermediary, but knowing Christ face to face. The Gnostic churches had numerous sacraments; and discipline was strict in the “white” brotherhoods. But, as in our own day, there were “black” cults which also called themselves Gnostic. St. Paul condemns them and their teachings as “knowledge (Gnosis) falsely so-called,” and these taught many depraved practices, such as religious prostitution. Such was the sect of the

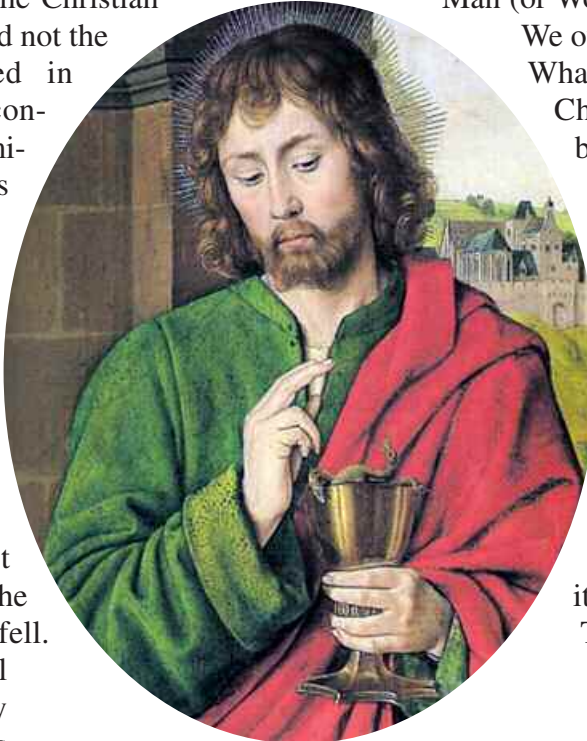
Nicolaitans, mentioned in Revelation as hated of Christ. The central sacrament of the Gnostic Mysteries was the Mystic Marriage of the neophyte with his Angel who represents him before the Throne of God. This is still in our own time the pivot of the esoteric work: the holy union of the lower with the Higher Self, called “finding the Man (or Woman) within.”

We ought at this point pause to ask, What has become of the teachings Christ gave to His disciples between the Resurrection and Ascension? Many Gnostic writers claimed to have at least part of these most esoteric of all esoteric teachings, for they said that they, like St. Paul, had seen and spoken with the Risen Christ face to face; and from these teachings given by the Risen Christ, Christian Gnosticism traces its origin.

This leads us to the question of an interesting class of documents called Pseudepigrapha, which means falsely ascribed, for they are written in the name of some ancient sage or prophet to whose authorship they are attributed. Such documents are prominent in Gnostic litera-

ture, but the Bible also contains many of them, as well as the Apocrypha proper. The Book, of Daniel for example, was certainly not written by Daniel nor even in his century. Even the Books attributed to Moses are obviously written by men who lived several centuries later than Moses. It is by no means proved, either, that St. Paul wrote all of the Epistles which appear in the New Testament under his name, and it was not, scholars suspect, the same John who wrote both Revelation and the Fourth Gospel.

It is hinted in Gnostic fragments that there was an Antichrist who lived and taught contemporaneously



Oil on wood, detail from *Anne of France, Duchess of Bourbon, Presented by St. John the Evangelist*, Jean Hey, active 1480-1500. The Louvre

While a legendary attempt to poison him explains the tradition of showing St. John holding a chalice with serpents, this representation is an occult reference to the “serpent” wisdom of Christian Gnosis and the regenerative energies of Scorpio.

with Christ in Palestine. The Manicheans spoke of an Antichrist as “the devilish Messiah of the Jews,” by which they were *not* referring to the Christ, for the Manicheans were Christians. Mani, a Persian by birth—who, like Jesus, was crucified through the machinations of a reactionary priesthood—taught a religion similar to Christianity based upon the esoteric doctrine of Zoroaster. His father seems to have been a Gnostic Christian, and Mani himself speaks highly of certain Gnostic teachers while rejecting the Church of Rome in its entirety. As mentioned above, an apocryphal Gospel of John was treasured by the Manicheans, and fragments of it have been recovered from the records of the Inquisition in France.

The tradition of an Antichrist who lived contemporaneously with the Christ is straight from the Hebrew Mysteries and corresponds to the Persian concept of Ahriman, the Lord of Darkness, coming to do battle with Mithra, the Messenger of Light. They could scarcely join battle unless they appeared in the world at the same time.

The two apocryphal books of supreme importance to Christianity are the Books of Esdras, attributed to Ezra, and the Book of the Secrets of Epoch. These also are pseudonymous documents, since they were obviously not written by the hand of the author whose name they bear. Esdras we shall consider later. Enoch, we mention in passing, was a Hellenistic work (hence, Gnostic,) written in Egypt and highly esteemed even in the narrower circles of the early Church; but it was consigned to an oblivion extending from the sixth to the nineteenth century, when it was rediscovered in Russia and Serbia. It dates from the first half of the first century, being perhaps contemporaneous with the Christ, and certainly with His earliest disciples.

We need not look upon the use of pseudonyms as a mark of dishonesty. It simply means that the authors of the pseudonymous books wrote “in the spirit of Enoch” or “in the spirit of Esdras.” Similarly, books attributed to Moses refer to a school of Mosaic thought, or, esoterically, to a Mystery Temple of Initiation. The name Epoch, for example, is variously defined by scholars, but one significant interpretation is “*The Initiated.*” Thus the various great Temple Builders and Prophets



represent Mystery Schools on the inner planes of nature, and for long centuries after the death of the body they continued to teach and guide their charges esoterically, appearing to them clothed either in the etheric or the astral body. And when students taught by these esoteric Masters committed their instructions and doctrines to parchment or papyrus, they had every *moral* right in the world to ascribe the work to the Master whose amanuensis they were.

However, it is contrary to modern usage, contrary to modern evolutionary trends, to write pseudonymous documents in this way. The man who does the actual physical and mental labor of writing the book is expected to sign his own name or a nom-de-plume, and that nom-de-plume ought not to be drawn from history, unless the writer knows himself to be an incarnation of the person whose name he takes. It was not dishonest, however, for the ancient Hebrew writers to use pseudonyms because it was a well understood custom among the Hebrews, just as we find that among the medieval Arabs a whole school of alchemical writers was known under the collective name of Geber, he being the founder of the school. It is as if all the graduates of Harvard were to write books signing themselves *Harvard!* They would simply be sinking their own identities in the common mission. But nowadays we look with suspicion upon such practices as encouraging fraud. We prefer to know *who* wrote *what*, and *why*.

As we have said, there are pseudepigrapha among the canonical Books and among the apocryphal Books. Beside these, there are many which are not now and never have been included in any orthodox canon. But *all* of the Apocrypha proper were once included in the canon.

Students often confuse the word *Apocalypse*

with *Apocrypha*. But this is not wholly incorrect, as common usage has made the word apocryphal cover the whole range of Mystery Books, regardless of differences in the source or nature of the mystery. From referring simply to hidden or esoteric books, the word *Apocrypha* has come to mean “spurious” books, or books of doubtful authority. *Apocalypse*, on the other hand, means the revealing of something which has previously been hidden. We naturally think of the Book of Revelation under this term first of all. Daniel is another classic example. An *apocryph* is a hidden document; an *Apocalypse* is a revelation of a hitherto secret matter. Some apocryphal books are Apocalypses, some are not.

Among the apocryphal books the Apocalypse of 2 Esdras is of prime importance to Christianity, also the Book of the Secrets of Enoch. The Secret Doctrine of Israel, guarded by the Essenes, goes back in its literary form to Esdras and the Exile; but the oral or unwritten tradition is still more ancient, going back to Moses—yes, and before Moses, even before Abraham, back to Enoch, the Initiated, who was the eldest Son of Cain and who has been tentatively identified with one of the most ancient Babylonian kings—a “dateless antiquity” indeed. Remember that Abraham came from Ur of the Chaldees, by admission of the Bible itself.

The Essenes, chief repository of the Secret Doctrine of Israel, gradually disappeared as Christianity arose because they were absorbed into the new Order. Meanwhile they had guarded their Doctrine upward of a thousand years, but not under the name of Essenes—that was only the last known name of the Order. But under one name or another they had been the custodians of the Mysteries from Moses until Christ and inheritors of the still more ancient tradition of Enoch. Apocalyptic literature is largely an expression of these Mysteries. As a literary form the Apocalypse covers an extended period of time: from the Exile to the Middle Ages in Europe; but more especially those centuries which included the rise of Christianity, from 200 B.C. to about 350 A.D.



Die Bibel in Bildern, Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1789-1853)

Canst Thou Number the Stars?

In the person of Abraham the impulse of spiritual evolution moved westward from Ur in Chaldea to Israel, or from the third (Egypto-Sumerian-Babylonian) to the fourth (Greco-Hebrew) Post-Atlantean Epoch.

During the two centuries immediately preceding the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, Hebrew Initiates were actively preparing for the coming of the Messiah and Messianic prophecies flooded the Jewish world. Historic evidence is lacking on the Persian and Chaldean side, but we may be sure that there too the Magi were nightly examining the heavens for the sign which should show that the Lord of Light was come.

We repeat that so far as the written record goes, the Secret Tradition of Israel dates from Ezra (Esdras), the founder of the Great Synagogue, which was a spiritual, not a merely material assembly. This is not to say that no material assembly was called. On the contrary the Bible record is perfectly clear on that point. But the assembly of disciples in the flesh was the merest shadow of the true esoteric Assembly on the inner planes of nature, which was a School of Initiation.

One hundred years after his death, so it is written, Ezra arose from the dead (was reborn), and through a supernaturally illumined memory dictated all the Scriptures lost or destroyed, which were to be kept secret and sacred and shown only to the wise (such as the Essenes). We see from this that

there were two Ezras in Bible history who lived, according to the body, a century apart, but who were in fact the same Ego. 2 Esdras, often called the Apocalypse of Esdras (not to be confused with a later Greek document of the same name), dates from the closing decade of the first century, being thus contemporary with the Gospel of John. It is a compilation of beautiful mystic visions together with their interpretations, which came to Esdras in the field of Ardath at Babylon.

The Apocalypse of Esdras *as a whole* could not possibly be the work of the historic Esdras, dating as it does from the Christian era; but it includes teachings and texts which are far older, and which do in fact bear the stamp of the original Esdras.

We must understand that all of Esdra's visions were experiences in the spiritual world while the prophet was apart from the body. Here we find the source of Marie Corelli's book title *Ardath*. Esdras' teacher and Initiator was the Archangel Uriel. He keeps the records of time and therefore can reveal both past and present in the Memory of Nature: "From the beginning, look, what thou desirest to see it shall be shown thee."

Uriel the Archangel commands Esdras: "Go into the field of flowers where no house is builded, and eat only of the flowers of the field [taste no flesh, drink no wine, but eat flowers only]; and pray unto the Highest continually; then will I come and talk with thee." Esdras comments, "So I went my way unto the field which is called Ardath, like as he commanded me; and there I sat among the flowers, and did eat of the herbs of the field, and the meat of the same satisfied me."

Here in the field of Ardath were written the Secret Books during a symbolic "forty days." "I shall light a candle of understanding in thy heart," says the Archangel, "which shall not be put out till the things be performed which thou shalt begin to write. And when thou hast done, some things shalt thou publish, and some things shalt thou shew secretly to the wise; tomorrow this hour shalt thou begin to write."

Then Esdras, in the Field of Ardath, for forty

THE LIVING CHALICE

The Mother sent me on the holy quest,
Timid and proud and curiously dressed
In vestures by her hand wrought wondrously;
An eager burning heart she gave to me.
The Bridegroom's Feast was set and I drew nigh—
Master of Life, Thy Cup has passed me by.

Before new-dressed I from the Mother came,
In dreams I saw the wondrous Cup of Flame.
Ah, Divine Chalice, how my heart drank deep,
Waking I sought the Love I knew asleep.
The Feast of Life was set and I drew nigh—
Master of Life, Thy Cup has passed me by.

Eye of the Soul, awake, awake and see
Growing within the Ruby Radiant Tree,
Sharp pain hath wrung the Clusters of my Vine;
My heart is rose-red with its brimmed wine.
Thou hast new-set the Feast and I draw nigh—
Master of Life, take me, Thy Cup am I.

—Susan Mitchell

days dictated day and night to five scribes, producing in all two hundred and forty books; of these the last seventy were kept secret and shown only to the Elect: "For in them is the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the stream of knowledge."

Thus in the Field of Ardath at Babylon was written down the Secret Tradition of Israel, which flowered openly in the Christ ministry.

And Esdras was translated from mortality to immortality there among the flowers, for it is written: "A voice called me, saying, Esdras, open thy mouth and drink that I give thee to drink. Then opened I my mouth, and behold he reached me a full cup, which was full as it were with water, but the color of it was like fire."

So Esdras drank of the Elixir of Life, the world's Panacea, and "when I had drunk of it, my heart uttered understanding, and wisdom grew in my breast, for my spirit strengthened my memory." □

—Ann Barkhurst