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THE
CHURCHMAN

MAY, 1894.

ART. I.—HERMAS AND THE FOUR GOSPELS.

PART II.

TO have complete knowledge of part of an organic whole we must know the whole. This principle applies to the elaborate allegory of Hermas, who rings the changes on his leading ideas, and repeats them in a variety of forms.

In the nature of man, according to Rabbinic writers, there are two factors, the evil "yetser" (Gen. vi. 5, *imagination*) and the good. Hermas in Mand. xii. personifies them as "Desires," and teaches that a man who has put on the Good Desire (*ἐπιθυμία*) will hate the Wicked Desire, and be able to bridle it at will. These Desires correspond to the two Spirits, the righteous and the wicked, of Mand. v.; and to the Angel of Righteousness and the Angel of Wickedness, whose opposing influences are the subject of Mand. vi. Their works are all manner of virtues and vices, which afterwards take the shape of dodecads of virgins and of women clothed in black respectively, the former named after the Christian graces, from Faith to Love, and the latter after evil qualities, from Unfaith to Hate (Sim. ix.). All this the imaginative writer interweaves with like variations upon the doctrine of the Two Ways, on which see "The Two Ways in Hermas and Xenophon," in No. 92 of the *Journal of Philology* (1893).

The figure of the "bench" reappears in Mand. xi.; and whatever it means on its second occurrence, our interpretation of it in Vis. iii. must be in harmony therewith.

The Church in the "Visions" of Hermas sits first upon a "chair" and afterwards upon a "bench," and these are the seats¹ of the false prophet and the true prophets respectively

¹ The word for "chair" is *καθέδρα* (Lat. *cathedra*), and the word for "bench," *συμφέλιον*, or *-έλλιον* (Lat. *subsellium*), although Liddell and Scott's "Lexicon" gives this in the plural (-ια) only.

in his eleventh "Mandate," which opens thus: "He showed me men seated on a bench and another man seated on a chair. And he saith to me, Seest thou those that are seated on the bench? I see them, Sir, say I. These, saith he, are faithful; but he that sitteth on the chair is a false prophet, who destroyeth the mind of the servants of God. I mean of the double-minded, not of the faithful. These double-minded ones then come to him as to a soothsayer, and inquire of him what shall befall them. . . . For he that consulteth a false prophet on any matter is an idolater and emptied of the truth."

Hermas asks for a test of true and false prophets, and he is told that the truly inspired man "giveth no answer to any man when inquired of, nor speaketh in solitude (for neither doth the Holy Spirit speak when a man wisheth Him to speak), but the man speaketh then when God wisheth him to speak"; and, when he comes into an assembly of righteous men, "being filled with the Holy Spirit, he speaketh to the multitude according as the Lord willeth."

Thus the bench connotes firm faith and true inspiration, and those who sit upon it are such as have received and speak the words of God. For prophets upon the bench, who receive and deliver messages of God as occasion arises, substitute the "first created" ideal Church, as seen in vision by Hermas; and analogy suggests that she must have received the "everlasting Gospel" in its entirety. Thus we come again to the conclusion that her session upon the bench is meant to indicate that she had received what the writer understood to be the complete Gospel, and that this was the firm basis of her authority and power.

Another analogy points to the same result: "The tower," she said, "which thou seest building is myself, the Church. . . . But the tower has been founded by the word of the almighty and glorious Name" (Vis. iii. 3). She, therefore, is established upon the "word" (*ῥῆμα*) of God, which her firm seat the bench should accordingly represent.

Up to this point we have made no use of the explanation of the appearances of the Church with which Vis. iii. concludes. "Listen," saith he, "concerning the three forms of which thou inquirest. In the first vision, wherefore did she appear to thee an aged woman and seated on a chair? . . . Because every weak person sits on a chair by reason of his weakness, that the weakness of his body may be supported. So thou hast the symbolism of the first vision."

"But in the second vision thou sawest her standing, and with her countenance more youthful and more gladsome than before, but her flesh and her hair aged. . . . For He had compassion on you, and renewed your spirits; and ye laid aside

your maladies, and strength came to you, and ye were made powerful in the faith, and the Lord rejoiced to see you put on your strength. And therefore He showed you the building of the tower; yea, and other things also shall He show you, if with your whole heart ye be at peace among yourselves."

"But in the third vision ye saw her younger, and fair, and gladsome, and her form fair. For as when to one sorrowing cometh good tidings (*ἀγγελία ἀγαθή*), he straightway forgetteth the former sorrows, and giveth heed to nothing but the tidings which he received, and is strengthened thenceforth unto that which is good, and his spirit is renewed by reason of the joy which he received; so ye also have received renewal of your spirits by seeing these *good things*. And whereas thou sawest her seated on a bench, the position is a firm one: for the bench has *four feet*, and stands firmly; *for the world also is upheld by means of four elements*. They, then, that have fully repented shall be young again, and *founded* firmly; they that have repented with their whole heart. Thou hast the revelation entire and complete. Thou shalt ask nothing more as touching revelation; but if anything lack yet, it shall be revealed to thee."

What is meant by the "four feet" of the bench, with reference to which it is said that the world likewise is upheld, or held fast (*κρατεῖται*), by "four elements"? Hilgenfeld, in his full and learned commentary on "Hermæ Pastor" (1881), simply quotes the three words from another writer, "argumentatio mere inepta"—it is a purely nonsensical piece of reasoning. There is then, it seems, no interpretation which "holds the field," and has to be displaced by a better. We have only to find one which makes sense of what had been thought nonsense. But if Origen compares the *Four Gospels to the elements of the faith of the Church, of which elements the whole world consists* (Art. i., p. 279), the four feet of the bench, which Hermas likens to the four elements of the world, may have been meant by him to denote the Four Gospels. The bench is eventually deposited in the tower (Vis. iii. 10), and thus becomes, as it should if it represents the fourfold Gospel, a lasting possession of the Church.

Sundry objections have been made to this solution; but (so far as I have observed) only by critics who were not acquainted with, or did not at the moment call to mind, the saying of Origen above quoted. This remarkable saying confirms the solution offered, and may itself have been suggested by the passage of Hermas, which it helps to interpret.

A reviewer of the "Witness of Hermas," in the course of some remarks upon the "Visions," writes: "But even so we cannot see why the bench with its four feet is the fourfold

Gospel. On the contrary, we are definitely informed that the four feet represent the four elements of the world, so that the whole image represents the world-wide extension of the Church universal.¹ I must confess that I fail to find any such definite information in the "argumentatio mere inepta" of Hermas. He does not say that the material elements are the things signified by the feet of the bench, but only that the two tetrads of things correspond to one another in some way which we are left to discover for ourselves. That the things signified by the four feet are analogues of the four elements of the *cosmos* is all that lies upon the surface. But when a later writer, like-minded with Hermas, makes the Four Gospels analogues of those elements, he obliges us to think that for that comparison he may possibly have been indebted to Hermas, as he certainly was for other striking ideas.

And why should Hermas not have meant to hint at the Four Gospels by means of the four feet of the bench?

The objections to be met are summed up in the two allegations: (1) That the context shows that he meant something else; and (2) that to credit him with knowledge of the Four Gospels would be an anachronism.

If we would give full and fair consideration to the case for covert allusion to, and use of the Four Gospels in the "Shepherd" of Hermas, we must for a time keep in abeyance all prejudice to the contrary arising from theories as to the dates of composition of the work of Hermas and of the Gospels.

Passing by for the present this chronological question, we have to determine whether it is exegetically a good solution of the problem which we have had before us to say that the four-footed bench symbolizes the fourfold Gospel.

The objection to this on internal grounds, which has been raised by several writers, is thus expressed by one already quoted: "For ourselves, we think that the most obvious interpretation of these visions would refer them to the renewal and restoration to its pristine fervour of the Church of Hermas' own day, the good tidings of the last vision being the revelation given through Hermas himself."

I grant without hesitation that this is indeed "the most joyous interpretation," and that it gives, so far as it goes, the true purport of much of what Hermas wrote. But it is well known that there are passages in his allegory where the sense, (if there be a sense) does not lie upon the surface; and

¹ It is added (after Zahn and others) that, like the bench in Hermas, the Bishop's seat in Cyprian's time was covered with linen. Hermas may or may not have taken a Bishop's seat for his model in this or that particular.

some study of his style has satisfied me that, fervently as he protests against double-mindedness, his expressions are sometimes chosen so as to convey a double sense. I venture to think that in some places where commentators inveigh against his ineptitude, it is because they have failed to catch the whole meaning of his words.

In Vis. iii. 1, the Church and Hermas being left alone, "She saith to me, Sit down here. I say to her, Lady, let the elders sit down first." No elders being present, what better proof could there be of the writer's wretched incompetence?—"versus enim hic melius alio scriptoris miseram scribendi artem indicat."

Of the author's own interpretation of the vision, it is said that it does not everywhere accord with the vision itself; and of something in chap. ii., that it flatly contradicts Vis. ii. 4. In the one place we read: "Listen (saith he) concerning the three forms of which thou enquirest. In the first vision wherefore did she appear to thee an aged woman, and seated upon a chair? Because your spirit was aged and already decayed, and had no power, by reason of your infirmities and double-mindednesses. . . . Wherefore, then, she was seated on a chair, I would fain know, Sir. Because every weak person sits on a chair by reason of his weakness, that the weakness of his body may be comforted." But in the earlier passage it had been explained that the Church appeared aged *because she was created before all things, and for her sake the world was framed*—the signs of age upon her no more implying failure of powers than the snow-white hair of the risen Son of man (Rev. i. 14) or of the "ancient of days."

The contradiction does not arise from any oversight of the writer, but he purposes to hint at two things by one symbol. The Church's decrepitude and rejuvenescence may have a local and temporal reference; but something more than the Church on earth as known to Hermas is signified by the pre-existent Holy Spirit which spoke with him in the form of the Church, which Spirit is the Son of God (Sim. ix. 1.).

The "chair," again, in Vis. i. seems to be only a chair of teaching like "*Moses cathedra*"; but use is made afterwards of its meaning *easy chair*, fit for an invalid, and the Church's sitting upon it is taken to signify that she is sick, and at the point of death.

If in the light of these illustrations we look again at the complete picture of the bench, the building of the tower, and the Church giving command to the archangelic "masters of all creation," we see that its significance is on far too large a scale to be "cribbéd, cabined, and confined" within the narrow limits of the "more obvious interpretation."

The statement of it quoted above ends with the words, "the good tidings being the revelation given through Hermas himself." But in the "Shepherd" the two things are not identified, but only compared; thus: "For as when to one sorrowing cometh good tidings . . . so ye also have received renewal of your spirits by seeing these good things." It is not said that Hermas, or others through him, received the "good tidings," but that they saw *good things*. At the end of the preceding chapter it had been said: "And therefore He shewed you the building of the tower; yea, and other things also shall we shew you, if with your whole heart ye be at peace among yourselves." And before the vision of the tower the Church had asked Hermas: "Seest thou a great thing?" And on his replying, "Lady, I see nothing," she had said: "Look there, dost thou not see in front of thee a great tower being builded upon the waters?" This, then, is the specification of the "good things" seen; as, again, in Sim. ix. 10 it is said of the tower there described: "I was joyous at seeing such good things."

The building of the tower being obviously the outcome of the preaching of the Gospel, the "good things" are Gospel, and the "good tidings" with which they are compared must be interpreted accordingly. Thus we come again by another way to what was first suggested by a study of the *Didaché*, namely, that the expression for "good tidings" was chosen by Hermas as a variation upon the word *Evangelium*.

What was it that suggested to him the word rendered "good things," which he uses of the tower, and by implication of the Gospel, not once only, but in both places where the tower is described?

Origen, in the context of his comparison of the Four Gospels to the four elements, uses and dwells upon the same word, finding it in the expression "gospelling good things," in Isa. lii. 7, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good." Compare Nahum i. 15, "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace."

That Hermas had in mind the above famous words of Isaiah in connection with the Gospel is more than probable. The prophet speaks also of "peace," and Hermas writes, "If with your whole heart ye be at peace among yourselves." Origen discusses the "feet" of the gosseller. Is it possible that they set Hermas thinking of the Church as resting upon a seat with feet?

The following statement of the sayings of Irenæus referred

to in Art. i., is repeated from the "Witness of Hermas to the Four Gospels":

"In Iren. iii. 11, 12 (ed. Harvey), we read, that there are not more than four Gospels, nor could there be fewer. For since there are four regions of the world, and four catholic winds, it was natural that the Church, which is spread over the whole earth, and has the Gospel for its *pillar* and stay and breath of life, should have four *pillars*, blowing incorruption from all quarters and rekindling mankind. The Word, the artificer of all things, that sits upon the cherubim, and holds the universe together, when He was manifested to men, gave us the Gospel in four forms, but held together by one Spirit. For the cherubim are four-faced (Ezek. i. 6), and their faces are emblems of the working of the Son of God. For the living creatures have respectively the aspects of lion, calf, man, eagle. And the Gospels are consonant with these, *upon which Christ sits*. . . . Correspondingly, continues Irenæus, the Word conversed with the patriarchs as Divine; gave priestly ordinances to those under the law; afterwards was made man; and sent forth the gift of the Spirit to all the earth. . . . As was the working of the Son of God, which was quadriform, such was the form of the living creatures, and such the character of the Gospels. And on this account there were four catholic covenants given to humanity. . . . The Gospels in some order correspond to these, the last in order corresponding to the actual Gospel covenant. . . . The Gospels of the Apostles only are true and firm, and it is impossible that there should be more or fewer than these, as we have shown at such length. *For when God has made all things compounded and fitted together, the form of the Gospel, too, must needs have been well compounded and compacted.*"

Here he alludes, we may suppose, to the doctrine of his day, that the world was compounded of four elements. But if so, he, too, likens the Four Gospels to those elements. And about the middle of the passage quoted he represents Christ as seated, so to say, upon the Four Gospels, like the Church in the "Shepherd." On some things in the passage we shall have occasion to touch in another article.

Hermas may well have been one of the authorities of Irenæus in this matter, for Eusebius writes of Irenæus, "And he not only knows, but even receives the writing of the 'Shepherd,' saying, Well then spake the Scripture, which says, First of all believe that God is one, even He that created all things."

Some who allow this qualify the admission by suggesting that Irenæus, "half a century or more later" than Hermas, went on to enlarge his symbolism of the number four, "with an additional reference to four Gospels." But let it first be proved

that Hermas wrote at so early a date that he could not have known the Four Gospels as the elements of the faith of the Church.

C. TAYLOR.

ART. II.—WE HAVE AN ALTAR.

AN EXPOSITION OF HEB. XIII. 10-12.

OF the first part of this passage, "we have an altar," Dean Alford gives a summary of the many different interpretations known to him. It may be well to specify them briefly:

1. He writes: "Some have said that no distinct idea was before him (the writer of the Epistle), but that he merely used the term *altar* to keep the figure he was about to introduce, and this view has just so much truth in it, that there is no emphasis on *θυσιαστήριον*: it is not *θυσιαστήριον ἔχομεν*." This is a valuable remark of the Dean, and one to be always borne in mind in our interpretation of the words.

2. "Others understand by the altar *Christ Himself*." But I ask, How could the victim be the altar on which it was itself offered?

3. "Some understand *the table of the Lord*, at which we eat the Lord's Supper." I remark, This view arises from two misconceptions: one, that the pronoun "we" in our English translation refers to Christians, *we Christians have an altar*, as distinguished from Jews, whereas there is no pronoun in the Greek; on the importance of this I shall enlarge further on; the other misconception, a baseless assumption, is that the elements of bread and wine are offered on the table as a sacrifice. Hence the anomalous expression "Altar-cloths." Who ever heard of a cloth being laid on an altar in either Pagan or Jewish ritual? To this also I shall again refer.

Alford's own view is, "that the Altar is the Cross of Christ on which the Lord suffered." The answer to this too generally held view I give from the "Speaker's Commentary." Dr. William Kay, the writer, says, "It cannot be the cross, that was the instrument by which our Lord's death was effected: but so far was it from being as the altar which sanctifieth the gift, that it stands as the outward symbol of the curse pronounced by the law (Gal. iii. 23) upon the malefactor. The cross was as little the altar as the Roman soldiers were priests." I may add, or as the knife by which the victim was slain was the altar on which that victim was offered.

The Commentary goes on to say, "nor yet can it be understood of *the Lord's table*. It is, of course, true to say that they who continued to serve the tabernacle had no right to partake