

TWO FLOOD-HYMNS OF THE EARLY CHURCH.

THE article which I wrote on the 38th Ode of Solomon in a recent number of the *EXPOSITOR* has attracted some attention and provoked corresponding questions and inquiries.

It will be remembered that by reforming the opening stanza of the hymn from

I went up into the light of truth as into a chariot,
to

I went on board the Light of Truth, like a ship,
or a little more freely,

I went on board the ship Light of Truth,
it was possible to make the opening verses lucid and intelligible, the ship being brought into harbour, and the verses into reasonable thought: and I believe that these first corrections have met with almost complete approval.

The next step was the identification of the ship with the Ark of Salvation, and the voyager with Noah or some one whom Noah typifies. Probably in this suggestion (as was to be expected when one ventured into the region of speculation) the endorsement was bound to be qualified or doubtful or non-existent. To some the conjecture was too rapid, to others I did not go far enough. For example,

the book of Joshua or the book of Judges, we find that the extent of Joshua's work has been greatly magnified in the imagination of later ages" (*Early Hist. of Israel*, 1897, p. 246); in the account of the conquest of Hebron, as in other parts of the Book of Joshua, there is "a tendency to ascribe the gradual occupation of Canaan to a single point of time, and to assign all the successive conquests made by the Israelites to the general who first led them across Jordan" (p. 256 f.); Joshua "was not the conqueror of Canaan, as the pious imagination of a later age supposed him to be: he merely opened the way to it. He taught the Israelites how to defeat the Canaanites, and he succeeded in destroying a few of their cities. But that was all; and the wholesale massacres which marked his progress" are very greatly exaggerated (p. 271).

it is asked, very properly, why I did not at once draw the baptismal parallel in 1 Peter iii. 20, 21, and interpret the rest of the Ode in the light of it. In that case the experiences of the Odist in his struggles against the wiles and witcheries of the Bridegroom-Deceiver and the Bride Co-operatrix, would represent the conflicts of the Christian on his way to Baptism; and the closing verses in which the stability of the divine foundation and the fruitfulness of the divine planting are spoken of, would be descriptive of the settled state of a recognised and fully-initiated Christian believer.

The answer to such an objection would be twofold. First of all, in a complex problem like this of the interpretation of the Odes, in which the greater part of the expositors, whether in Germany or elsewhere, must be on the wrong track, from their sheer inconsistency with one another, it would be well to see that we have not exhausted the possible interpretations before we shout Eureka over any particular one. There may be other explanations, as the wise sometimes say.

In the next place, the answer to the inquiry lies in the article itself, in which it was pointed out that there were parallels with the book of Genesis which suggested that Noah was speaking, in person, in the Ode, and apparently speaking in his own defence, and absolving himself from the sin of drunkenness and perhaps from other forms of moral laxity that associate themselves therewith. This explanation, which will seem to some to border on the ingenious rather than the verifiable, left out of account the latter part of the hymn, or stopped short without discussing it. The right explanation, however, must cover the whole of the Ode, whether the explanation be baptismal, or autobiographical and historical.

I propose, then, to continue the investigation of the

Noachic hypothesis and see whether it can be carried to the end of the Ode, without violence to reason or good sense. If it cannot be so carried, we must abandon it, and try whether the baptismal hypothesis, or some other, will give better results. In order to test the matter, and in the full consciousness that I may after all be on the wrong track, I resume the argument.

If we were right in assuming that this Ode was to be regarded as spoken by Noah, or by some Noachic representative, we are naturally invited to extend our hypothesis, that the Ship, named Light and Truth, or Light of Truth, is the ark, and go on to argue that the whole of the Ode is an *Apologia Noachi*, an attempt to justify the perfect man for his lapse into intoxication; and we have shown that this problem of the vindication of the character of the Old-Testament saint was one that had to be faced by early Christian teachers as well as by the Jewish Rabbis. It will be admitted that this idea of a Noachic apology, delivered in his own person, explains much of the language in which drunkenness and the wise man's escape from it is described in the middle of the Ode. The Deceiver and his Bride may very well be the personified forms of Lust and of Intemperance. That Noah was preserved from Lust may be seen in Ephrem Syrus, *Nisibene Hymns* i. 4, "Noah overcame the waves of lust, which had drowned in his generation the sons of Seth." It is involved in Genesis vii. 1, "Thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation." Noah's escape from intemperance was more difficult to establish, and required a special affirmation.

If, however, this can be maintained as a reasonable point of view, the latter part of the Ode will require that not only Noah is justified, but the planting of the vine is seen not to have been a fatal step in human progress for which the early agriculturist must be held responsible. Thus we

must have an *Apologia pro plantatione Noachi* as well as an *Apologia Noachi*; the argument that Noah did not really get drunk, of which we saw traces in Philo and elsewhere, having attached to it as a pendant the argument that it was not really Noah that planted the vine, but God Himself. This is what appears to underlie the concluding stanzas of the Ode, and it is not difficult to find support for the suggested explanation.

In the first place Genesis could be appealed to for the statement that the Lord God had produced out of the ground every tree that was good for food (Gen. ii. 9), and this appears to be what was at the back of Philo's mind when he came to the problem of Noah's planting, and turned aside to show that it is God who must be regarded as the real and original planter of all the forms in the universe (see Philo, *De Plant. Noe*, c. i.). In this way the responsibility could be transferred from the patriarch to Providence; and the argument could be made stronger by reference to those passages in which, either in the Psalms or the Prophets, God was expressly described as having planted a vine (a favourite symbol for His care over the chosen people).

Supposing, then, that we keep this possible explanation of the Ode before our minds, it will be of interest to examine whether any of the remaining obscurities in the Ode will disappear.

It is clear that the concluding stanzas are a panegyric upon the Divine planting; but it is not easy to see where the new subject comes in. There is a very obscure reference in v. 17.

My foundations were laid on the hand of the Lord,
Because he established me.

But this requires some correction; in the second line we should read

Because He planted me,

which makes connexion with what follows : then the words "on the hand of the Lord" are nonsense : it should be "by the Lord," the idiom being natural in Hebrew and Aramaic, and possible, though not at all likely in Syriac. Supposing this corrected, we have still the obscure line.

My foundations were laid by the Lord ;

it clearly ought to be something about the vine, to the effect that it was planted by the Lord. The word "foundations" must be corrupt ; for $\{\Delta\omega \{\Delta\bullet$, "foundations," read $\{\Delta\omega \Delta\downarrow\Delta\bullet$, "the planting of the vine-stock," and read the stanzas as follows :

The planting of the vine-stock was appointed by the Lord,
Because He had planted it :
For He set the root and watered and fixed it and blessed it ;
And its fruits are for ever.

We can now use the 80th Psalm to illustrate the Ode, especially such verses as

Ps. lxxx. 8.

Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt,
Thou hast cast out the heathen *and planted it*.

9. Thou preparedst room before it,
And *didst cause it to take deep root*, and it filled the land.

15. And the vineyard [more exactly *vinestock*, Syr. $\{\Delta\omega$ *ut supra*]
which thy right hand hath planted.

(Cf. *Ode* 38) v. 21. The beautiful *planting of his right hand*.

v. 18. He *set the root*.

- v. 19. He *dug deep*, and caused it to come up and spread it wide,
and filled [? the land] and was enlarged.

It will be observed that in making the corrections involved in the foregoing translation, we have removed the possessive pronouns and a corresponding suffix from the seventeenth verse and have made that verse begin a new section. As it stood originally it was as follows :—

(Ver. 15). I was made wise so as not to fall into the hands

of the deceiver ; and I congratulated myself because the Truth went with me, (*v.* 16) and my foundations were laid by the hand of the Lord, because He established me : (*v.* 17) For He set the root and watered it and fixed it and blessed it, and its fruits are for ever. (*v.* 18) It struck deep, etc.

“ My ” and “ me ” in *v.* 16 are due to the influence of the previous verse ; the matter becomes impersonal in the following verses. Or we may, if we please, imagine a new section opened and the Vine to be speaking in its own defence, as Noah does anonymously in the earlier part of the composition. The changes made in the text are slight : their justification will lie in the restored intelligibility of the passage.

We have now divided the song into its three constituent themes : the bringing of the ship (ark) into harbour ; the self-justification of Noah ; and the justification of the Vine. The whole of the Ode is now read in the light of the story of Noah in the book of Genesis : and the explanation would seem to be sufficient and complete. I do not say that this excludes a possible reference to the typical character of the salvation at the Flood, for it is well known that the early Christians interpreted that event baptismally ; whether we ought to do so in the present case is a matter for further consideration.

Perhaps we may advance the subject a little further by trying our hand on another of the Odes which, at the first reading, seem to be hopelessly obscure ; I refer to Ode 24.

This Ode appears to begin with a reference to the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at His Baptism, and to the voice from Heaven which is recorded in the Gospels. Accordingly we are told that

The Dove fluttered over the Messiah : for He was her head :
And she sang over Him, and her voice was heard.

Here it was natural to point out that the Holy Spirit

was regarded as feminine, and in some way subordinate to the Christ, and that the Voice from Heaven was not the Voice of the Father, but of the Holy Spirit, who appears in Ebionite literature as the Mother of Jesus. The interpretation sacrifices the orthodoxy of the Odist in one or two directions.

But even when we have explained in this way the opening stanzas of the Ode, we are plunged immediately into an "obscure wood" and lose our way.

What does it mean when the Odist continues :

The inhabitants were afraid,
And the sojourners were moved :
The birds dropped their wings,
And all creeping things died in their holes ;
And the abysses were opened which had been hidden.

There seems to be no possible connexion between these verses and what precedes them : but suppose we note that there was a historical occasion when all creeping things died in their holes, namely, at the time of the Flood, we can see that the writer is describing a judgment upon the inhabitants of the earth, which judgment extends to the animal creation. The birds drop their wings and presumably are drowned ; the creeping things perish. The fountains of the great *abyss* are broken up (see Gen. vii. 11) and the windows of heaven *were opened*. The parallel with the Odes will be noticed. In Genesis vii. 21 we are expressly told that every creature which moved on the earth was destroyed, *birds*, *beasts*, and *every creeping thing which creepeth* on the earth and all mankind.

Suppose, then, we use the Flood as the motive of the Ode, and see whether we can illustrate some more of the obscurities which attach to it.

The passages which describe the destruction of man are

hard to translate, and still more difficult to interpret. As I have rendered them, they run as follows :—

They perished, in the thought, those that had existed from ancient times :

For they were corrupt from the beginning,
 And the end of their corruption was the life of all,
 And every one of them that was imperfect perished ;
 It was not possible to give them a word that they might remain ;
 And the Lord destroyed the imaginations of all them that had not the truth with them.

There are few passages more obscure than this, in the whole of the Odes : my own translation, at certain points, is impossible ; but I cannot find any other translation of those who have tried to elucidate the passage that is much better. Perhaps we can see the direction in which to look for an explanation. Our key was the story of the Flood, and the Flood comes about through the observation of the Lord that the imagination of man's heart was only and always evil ; so the Lord repented the making of man (Gen. vi. 5, 6). The thought of man's heart is, in fact, evil from his youth up (Gen. viii. 21). It seems likely that it is in such passages as these that we have the key to the statement in the Odes that men were corrupt beyond recovery ; and with a few slight alterations we can make the Ode intelligible, and get back to the text which the Syriac translator is trying to render for us ; we may imagine it to have run as follows :—

They were corrupt in imagination, those that lived in the ancient days ;

Corrupt were they from the beginning ;
 Their corruption was the end of the life of all things ;
 Every one of them that was imperfect perished.
 It was not possible to give them permission to remain :
 The Lord destroyed the imaginations of all them that had not the truth with them.

But this does not explain the whole of the Ode : it finds us a Noachic situation, as in Ode 38 ; but it does not explain

the opening stanzas sufficiently, nor the curious account of the abysses that cry out for food. Of these the former seems to be most naturally referred to the Messiah, who can hardly be Noah, though we should expect Noah's dove to come in with Noah's flood, which is our fixed point of departure in the explanation of the Ode.

The suggestion at which we have been working was made tentatively by Kleinert in *Studien u. Kritiken* for July, 1911. Kleinert suggested the explanation about the death of the birds (*τὰ πετεινά*) and the creeping things, and he thinks the dove in the opening verse is Noah's dove, distinguished from the rest of the fowls that perish. He thinks that baptismal references are not necessarily excluded, but he does not follow the matter beyond the pointing out of the elucidatory Biblical parallels. It is possible that the dove at the Baptism had been identified, in Rabbinic fashion, with the dove at the Flood, and the transition from one to the other was easier for the Odist than for ourselves.

The allusions to the hungry abysses are, however, much harder to concatenate with the rest of the Ode. In my comment upon these passages, I have assumed that the reference is to the descent into Hades, and that the Ode is Christian in origin, though I was not able satisfactorily to explain why the descent into Hades should come up in an Ode which treats of the Baptism of the Lord. Dr. Bernard finds the link, perhaps rightly, in Patristic glosses upon the words of the Psalm

The abysses saw thee and were afraid ;

but the transition is still very abrupt from the "terrified waters" to the "harrowing of hell." We cannot, however, get rid of the allusion to the descent into Hades, as may be seen by the following illuminating parallels to the statement

in the Odes that "the abysses cried out like women in travail, and no food was given to them, because it did not belong to them." When we turn to the *Nisibene Hymns* of Ephrem Syrus, we find as follows :

Carm. Nisib. 39, 18 : I [Sheol] was fed upon the dead, yea ! I feasted upon corpses. Elijah slew the prophets of Baal, and gave them to me [the prophets], who on the bread of Jezebel had waxed fat. The righteous has constrained me to devour, but Jesus has compelled me to disgorge all I had eaten.

Carm. Nisib. 35, 6 : Gluttonous Death lamented and said, I have learned fasting, which I used not to know. . . . One man has closed my mouth, mine who have closed the mouths of many.

Hades is compelled to disgorge, and is put on a starvation diet : no food is given to it : it has no further rights to aliment ; that is the meaning of the *Descensus ad inferos*. It seems to be conclusive that the hungry Hades in Ode 24 is the Abyss which cries in vain for food to the triumphant Lord who liberates the imprisoned souls : and it remains to co-ordinate the thought of the Descent into Hades with the theme of the destruction at the Flood. The connecting link is the word *abyss*. In any case that is the motive for the apparently intruded theme. Is it possible to read the reference parenthetically or are we reduced to treat it as an interpretation ? the passage must run something like this :

The great deep was opened which lies hidden beneath :

[that great deep which, like a travailing woman, had cried to the Lord for food, and not obtained it, because it was not theirs to have ; the abyss that is now sealed with the Lord's seal] Those that were corrupt in their imagination perished, etc. . . .

We are obliged to use the parenthesis, in order to make sequence, for the Ode returns to the theme of the destruction of the people who are corrupt in their imagination, and ends on that note. The Noachic situation dominates the Ode. But a parenthesis of this kind, awkward and forced, is what we should ordinarily call an interpolation, and in

this case the interpolation is definitely Christian. The situation is a peculiar one: we start from the assumption of unity in the composition, and we are driven into Harnack's position of an assumed interpolation of the document by a Christian hand! Moreover the Noachic situation is, in itself, Jewish rather than Christian. If the document has been interpolated in verses 3-4 by a Christian hand, it is natural to infer that something of the same kind is responsible for the Christianisation of the opening verse of the Ode. In its original form the 24th Ode, like the 38th, was an Ode of Noah. It is very curious that the critical pendulum should swing back so strongly into a former position.

Reference was made above to Kleinert's illuminating note in the recent number of *Studien und Kritiken*. To be just, however, to previous investigators, it should be pointed out that the parallels with the Flood story in Genesis had already been made in *Preuschen's Zeitschrift* (Heft 3, 1910) by Spitta.

Spitta (p. 279) begins by pointing out with Harnack that the opening of the Ode refers to the Baptism of Jesus, but that the rest of the Ode cannot be co-ordinated with this. Spitta agrees with Harnack that the "voice of the Dove" refers to something which has no parallel in the incidents of the Baptism: for how could the praise of the Messiah lead to a general fear on the part of the inhabitants of the earth? The dove's voice must announce judgment, if people are to be so stricken with fear. Spitta then points out that this judgment is contained in the sixth verse of the Ode, and that the parallels to this verse are to be found on the one hand in Genesis vi. 7, vii. 19; and on the other in Genesis vi. 5, 13, 17, viii. 21. The conjunction between the perishing fowls of the air and the creeping things that die in their holes is to be made through Genesis vi. 7, 21, 23.

The rest of Spitta's argument is not so clear; for want of knowledge of the Christian parallels which we adduce from Ephrem, he failed to see the meaning of the hungry abysses, and thought the reference was to the beasts outside the Ark, who had no food prepared for them. He saw, however, that the reference to the thoughts of corrupt man in *v. 5* was to be explained by Genesis *vi. 5*, and came to the conclusion that, with the exception of the difficulty as to the original form of the first verse, and one or two less important points, there was not much that remained obscure. I think it must be allowed that his position and conclusion have been much strengthened by the additional explanations which we have brought forward.

So far, then, the argument approaches very nearly to the force of a demonstration. At the risk of weakening it, and in the full consciousness that nothing more than a speculation can be attempted, we may ask what was the original form of the opening stanza.

In the first place the Dove must be Noah's dove, and unless the Messiah is Noah, some change must have been made in the text. What we should expect is a reference to the olive-branch which the Dove carries. The suggestion arises that we should read

The dove fluttered down on the olive-tree.

The next verse must remain obscure; the last two lines do not require any change of text, and the whole stanza is an introduction to what follows, which is the song that the dove sang on the top of the olive-tree, a song of Divine Judgment. The Ode can now be printed as follows:

The dove fluttered down on the olive-tree,

And she sang upon it,

And her voice was heard:

[Song of the Dove]

The inhabitants [of the earth] were afraid :
 The dwellers [therein] were moved :
 The birds dropped their wings, [and died] :
 All the creeping things died in their holes,
 etc., etc.

If we are right in having discovered two Noachic Odes in our collection, neither of which is originally Christian, we may very well ask for time and for a delay of judgment with regard to the rest of the book. We must find the key to the situation in the interpretation of those passages which most resist explanation : if we can make the obscurest Odes intelligible, we shall be more likely to be on the right track than in searching for coincidences of language in out-of-the-way Patristic corners.

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*THE JEWS AND THEIR TEMPLE IN
 ELEPHANTINÉ.*

SINCE my article on the Jewish records of Elephantiné was printed in the EXPOSITOR of last August, the long and impatiently expected publication of the Berlin papyri by Professor Sachau has appeared. It is a magnificent work, reflecting all the best traditions of German scholarship. It is too soon as yet to deal with the many questions and problems which the publication raises ; all that I can do at present, therefore, is to write a sort of supplement to my previous article.

The copies of the petition to Bagoas and the answer of the Persian Government still constitute the most important part of the discovery, at all events so far as its bearing upon the Old Testament is concerned. In one or two cases Professor Sachau has been able to improve upon his earlier readings and translations. Thus the revised translation that he offers for lines 27 and 28 of the Petition, due