

APROPOS FOUR RECENT BOOKS ON THE SCROLLS

- Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, Secker and Warburg, 1956. Pp. 436. 30s.
Charles T. Fritsch, *The Qumran Community*, Macmillan, 1956. Pp. 147. 23s.
Geoffrey Graystone, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Originality of Christ*, Sheed and Ward, 1956. Pp. 119. 8s. 6d.
John M. Allegro, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, Pelican, 1956. Pp. 208. 3s. 6d.

IN spite of Père de Vaux's plaintive remark that the Qumran manuscripts were not found (I quote him *ad sensum*) by frogmen, it seems that the title 'Dead Sea Scrolls' is setting up house in English-speaking countries. Only one of our four books declines it and its sales, no doubt, will suffer for its honourable fastidiousness. We may say at once that all four are well worth having. But it is the business of the honest reviewer to put himself in his reader's place—I mean to enter into his purse, time, mind—and from there to contemplate his policy.

Millar Burrows with his four hundred and thirty-five pages and his fee of thirty shillings is a man of proved scholarship and of sound judgment. He is probably the most qualified of all the four to write on this subject. He alone offers a translation of the published non-Biblical texts and this of itself is enough to commend his book beyond all the others. It would have been better still if, as in Vermès,¹ explanatory footnotes had accompanied the text. Nevertheless, the text is there and its absence from the other three is a thousand pities since it leaves the reader at the mercy of the author's selection and interpretation. One comes away from Allegro and (pardonably, considering his scope) from Graystone with the impression that the non-Biblical manuscripts of Qumran are a tissue of New Testament approximations; one reaches the last line of the sixty-page Qumran text in Burrows wondering what all the excitement is about. This second reaction is without doubt excessive, and we shall return to this later, but it is not unhealthy. At least, it helps us to appreciate the sobriety of Burrows' conclusion:

I must confess that after studying *The Dead Sea Scrolls* for seven years I do not find my understanding of the New Testament substantially affected. Its Jewish background is clearer and better understood, but its meaning has neither been changed nor significantly clarified (p. 343).

¹ Géza Vermès, *Les Manuscrits du Désert de Juda*, Desclée, 1954. We hope it is not disorderly to express a preference for this book over the four under review.

Though we may qualify this judgment we should not do well to forget it; it is the judgment of a scholar. But if we may return to our point, defying boredom, we earnestly plead that no future book—I mean *popular* book—be published without an annotated translation of the principal non-Biblical manuscripts. As well, and much better, have a gospel commentary without text, for at least the gospel text is easily available.

The smaller work by Charles Fritsch is similarly marked by a conscientious, unpartisan presentation of the main facts and by a prudent reserve without which discussion on a topic of such moment would be mischievous. He and Burrows are of the *Il Penseroso* school. There is nothing here to compare with the verve of Allegro who has all the enthusiasm and dash of one actually engaged in the exciting, if wearing, business of decipherment. The defects of those qualities can only be amiable when the whole book is so attractive and fresh. It foregoes the arid presentation of rival views, alas so necessary, that characterises the work of Burrows. It cheerfully adopts a hypothesis and excitedly goes through with it: 'it seems' on one page becomes 'we have seen' on another¹ and the reader runs breathless but eager behind. From Muhammad Adh-Dhib's (somewhat doubtful) goat to the last sweeping conclusion (which may be an understatement) that Christianity has given 'the basic elements of (Qumran's) faith a far wider setting' we are gripped by the zeal of the hunt. We may gallop too heartily, of course. Thus, it may be that the famous Teacher of Righteousness (as yet, according to Burrows, unidentifiable) was of the period of Alexander Jannaeus; it may be that he was behind the attack on Alexander; it may be that he claimed the title of priestly Messiah at this time; it may be that he met his end by crucifixion (only one more added to the eight hundred crucified enemies of Jannaeus) but a sorites in hypotheticals does not quite vindicate a conclusion in this form:

One might surmise that the Sectarians had particular cause to recall this (crucifying) activity of Jannaeus since their Master had suffered the same cruel death (p. 100).

The range of 'one might surmise' may appear doubtful here (or should we understand 'if' for 'since'?), but one suspects that it was precisely this sort of ambiguity which helped to blow up the storm after Mr Allegro's original broadcast. But this is only an example and a warning: at this stage, after all, hypotheses must be made

¹ Compare pp. 96 and 148 on the identity of the 'Lion of Wrath'

and the intelligent reader must be left to recognise them for himself. Allegro's book is first-rate and would be cheap at three times the price.

As an antidote, if needed, to the slight acidity of Allegro we commend Graystone. These two together will cost you twelve shillings and you will read them; Burrows you may not; though we must repeat the mournful truth that you will still lack the texts of Qumran. Father Graystone sets out to silence that too happily alliterate catch-phrase: 'Qumran the cradle of Christianity.' And he does it well. His task is not easy: counter-argument on the conservative side (and possibly Father Graystone is a little too cautious) is never as exciting as the first impetuous charge from new and unforeseen positions. Very justly he points out that affinity of thought and expression between Qumran and the New Testament is due, in large measure, to common ancestry—the Old Testament. Perhaps he does a little less than justice to the influence of the 'inter-testamental' period lest he appear to compromise the 'originality' of Christ (a convenient but dangerously vague term to which we shall have to return). But why draw the line at the Old Testament? Even if we are thinking in terms of time—which we are not—it might be well to remember that the two books of Maccabees belong to Qumran's period. If we are thinking—as we are—in terms of the Spirit's activity, we should avoid setting arbitrary limits: the gift of the Spirit is not confined to *Scriptural* inspiration. If Caiaphas could speak 'not of himself' (John 11:51) but with the deep unheeded meaning of the Spirit, what of the most pious in Israel—of Essenism, of Qumran? The Word-made-flesh is not the beginning of revelation (it was the Word that was in the beginning) but its climax. We say all this not to settle a matter of fact (this must be done by a dispassionate comparison of Qumran and New Testament texts) but to declare a point of principle. Let us *suppose*, for instance, that Qumran associates the idea of suffering—even of the Isaian Suffering Servant—with the Messianic hope: what is this but a great and truly Biblical advance beyond the popular Davidic conception? And has the Spirit nothing to do with it? And if Our Lord took over the Qumran ideal—though with Jeremiah and Job and Second Isaiah before him he did not need to—and approved and lived it, we should not be surprised.

It must be confessed that with the discussion in its present stage the Christian apologete may be tempted to irritability. It is natural. The air, the popular air that is, is full of uninformed and unformed objections like buzzing, invisible flies. Straight language, he feels,

should be used in this serious matter and facile metaphor ('cradle of Christianity') is no good substitute. If we are to have allegations at this unsuitable stage (he says to himself), let them be clearly made. If the charge is that Christ adds nothing to Qumran, let it be uttered; it will ring hollow enough. If the charge is that Christ had much in common with a community of devout Jews dedicated to poverty and perfection, who need gainsay it? If the charge is that he borrowed from Qumran the best it had to offer, why, we already knew that 'he grew in wisdom and age' and therefore in experience. All this is very true. It is also very defensive. And yet there is material for positive argument if we are not too distracted to look for it. So, for example, to minimise the relationship between the Johannine writings and Qumran is a defensive measure. I am not for a moment suggesting that Father Graystone does so for this reason, but one feels that a Catholic Johannine specialist should be heard on the point: 'It seems to me,' writes Père Boismard,¹ 'that the Johannine dualism of world subjected to God and world subjected to Satan, of light and darkness, etc. can hardly be explained except in function of (*en référence à*) Qumran theology.' What follows? Burrows, Fritsch and Allegro faithfully note it (I quote Allegro): 'No longer can John be regarded as the most Hellenistic of the evangelists . . . the whole framework of his thought is seen now to spring directly from a Jewish sectarianism rooted in Palestinian soil and his material recognised as founded in the earliest layers of gospel tradition.' Here is a change indeed in the world of scholarship! The Rylands Papyrus helped to situate the fourth gospel in time and now the Qumran manuscripts are taking it from its supposed Hellenistic thought-world and placing it firmly in the Semitic. What further? If this primitive Semitic Gospel is, as it most surely is, pervaded by the divinity of Christ, what becomes of Allegro's own insinuation (pp. 161-2) that Paul has intruded his own Christology on the gospel? So, too, we might follow up the indications of a ritual meal, with bread and wine, at Qumran, to ask whether pagan models were needed (this has been frequently alleged) to transform our Lord's Last Supper into a ritual meal. In short, by new discoveries we have everything to gain if we are patient—and we trust others will be patient too.

Finally, since we have taxed others with vagueness, let us try to clear our own minds. What is meant by the 'originality' of Christ? In this context we are plainly not speaking of the theological uniqueness of his person and of his efficacious redemptive work. The 'originality' of Christ here evidently refers to his historically verifiable preaching. Now of our Lord's moral aphorisms it has been said that no single

¹ *Revue Biblique*, 1956, p. 268

one of them cannot be paralleled, and often verbally paralleled, in rabbinic literature—and it would be rash to allege rabbinic dependence on Jesus. The originality lies not in these moral maxims but in all that lies behind them. Christ was not crucified for being a rabbi of the rabbis but for some bolder claim. It is not enough to say, with Allegro, that Jesus and the Qumran sectaries have this in common : the sense of impending climax. The whole of the New Testament, not one passage here or there, drives home the central truth that Jesus himself *is* the climax. It is his exorcisms that show that the Kingdom has come, it is he who sees Lucifer falling from heaven, the Law and the Prophets were until John but with Jesus it is the time of the kingdom. It is this confident awareness of himself that lies behind all his moral demands with their authority and urgency and behind the assured conviction that his offer is unprecedented and unrepeatable : who does not gather with him scatters. In other words, 'the Christology lies behind the aphorisms, not ahead of them ; this means that at no point is the literary or historical critic able to detect in any stratum of the synoptic material evidence that a Christological interpretation has been imposed upon an un-Christological history.'¹ If the teaching of Christ may be matched elsewhere in part and in detail it remains, in its ensemble and with the unique Christology that inspires and sustains it, an unrivalled body of teaching which is an objective and verifiable fact. In this it is 'original.' With it not even the whole rabbinic corpus has anything to compare—and certainly not the 'deep devotion, high hopes and pathetic aberrations' of Qumran. This is the true perspective which may have been, may still be, distorted in the present excitement. Within that perspective we may read with less disappointment the rather negative conclusion of Burrows : 'Perhaps the best thing the Dead Sea Scrolls can do for us is to make us appreciate our Bible all the more by contrast.'

Now all this—the matter and manner of Christ's teaching in itself and as compared with that of others, of Qumran, for example—is the concern of the critical historian. He is not, however, professionally interested in the ultimate truth or falsehood of that teaching. In so far as this last is pervious to human reasoning it is the business of the historical philosopher : it is for him to contemplate the ruins and oblivion of Qumran and to contrast these with the enduring phenomenon of dynamic Christianity (which, in its turn, is only partially appreciable by the historical philosopher as such). He will then pronounce judgment upon the original worth of the two compared

¹ Hoskyns and Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament*, 1931, p. 145. One feels that Mr Allegro has more than once ignored certain conclusions like this which are based on sound Gospel criticism.

institutions, the dead and the living. This judgment will be still more valuable (other things being equal) if our philosopher has personally felt the dynamism of Christianity, for then he better understands one of the terms of his comparison.¹ Acceptance of this judgment is not, needless to say, an act of theological faith but an acquiescence of human reason. Nevertheless, it prepares for that faith—which, we must never forget, is a supernatural gift of God—and demonstrates that the act, when made, is not blind but a prudent human act made in accordance with right reason. By the act of theological faith itself we believe that Christ's truth is not merely superior to all that is most precious in Qumran but is itself an ultimate and an absolute.

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¹ This against the allegation, which has been made once or twice, that those 'with religious commitments' are dangerous guides in this Qumran affair. The accusation must surely be directed against such judgments as we are speaking of: no-one, it is hoped, would care to impugn the scholarly integrity of the Catholic priests who are actually working on the decipherment of the Scrolls.