

THE ARCHANGELS OF THE AVESTA.

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MEN of the day do not care so much for winged messengers from God, be these supposed existing objects great, medium, or little.

Forced at a rapid pace to deal with matters of life and death, and sometimes with things of more than either, we are thankful enough to have our way to Heaven clear and wide with no encumbering forms to intervene or help us. And we may well grudge one of our crowded moments to consider such a thing as the nature of conjectural Archangels, even of the most distinguished calibre, past or present.

Yet elsewhere these fine concepts live on in the minds of men, and are taken seriously beyond all question yet, and they excite no little sentiment.

And of all Archangels, or Angels, as I suppose we know, the most important, judged by persons from without and thoroughly unprejudiced, are those of our sister Faith,—the Lore of ancient Persia, with that of Cyrus and Darius “who brought the people back.”

We should all be glad indeed to see these forms on canvas, in marble, or in poems; there they would be most effective, as we all admit; yet could they, each and every one of them, be reduced to reason, we should be better pleased.

We have all doubtless heard their well-known name, the Ameshaspends,—at least those of us who read our Bibles—with some comments, for in every serious explanation of the exilic Books and of Tobit, they must be mentioned.

Tobit for instance seems a tale centering in the very Zoroastrian city, Ragha near modern Teheran.

This was so thoroughly an Avesta city that the name Zara-

thushtra became identified with its civic officers, losing its strict application to a family; so much so that it was used artificially, in the plural and even in the superlative degree.

The leading Mayor or Governor was called "Most Zarathushtra"; and so in Tobit, to correspond, we have the Seven Spirits in conspicuous form with a chief Gãthic demon to keep them company, while the town itself is mentioned more than once. The Seven Ameshaspends—Amshaspands some would call them—are "the August Immortals"; others venture fully on "Holy," "The Holy Immortals."

They seem from what I shall say below to have had almost more sway over admirations, hopes and fears than any others of the kind throughout all history; for the Gods of Greece and Rome were different. They, the Amesha, ruled in the wide Persian realm even so late as between 226 A. D. till the Arab Conquest; and how much earlier? Above Teheran they ruled two centuries still later on, see below. They named the very months and days in the later periods, even in the late Avesta, perhaps in the earlier times as well, while the words entered into the etymology of many a proper name.

The chief objects of the Creation were closely linked with them, sometimes too much so. Asha ruled the Fire in later times doubtless from the sight of the abounding Altars, where Fire was sacramental. Its own name included Ritual, Asha, better Arsha, equaling Rita of the Veda; Bahman, or Vohumanah represented man and the living creatures;—Why? Khshathra ruled the metals, so by a mere accident of terms and in false inference from a Gãtha passage; Aramaiti was very often, even as in the Veda, "Earth."

Haurvatât guarded Water and gave it her name at times; Ameretatât presided over plants and named them; and the two Haurvatât and Ameretatât occur in the characteristic dual form, linked as it were together as "wood and moisture." Curious. Not one of these late ideas was original in the meanings of the distinguished words. A man could not drink even out of a bronze fountain without the name of the Archangel as the god of metals;—"Khshathra-vairya" he was called there always with his adjective "vairya," which was taken from the Gãthas; but it means "the kingdom to be desired" (sic), and had no other sense; nor could he think of "holy Earth" without Aramaiti, here also with her added epithet the "spenta," "spenta-armaiti," for short "Spendarmad." She was so sacred as the earth, that one couldn't trail a corpse upon her, nor bury in her; the first hints at sanitation these, and they had their use. But the words describe the Divine Activity, the ara-mind, of God,

—no thought of mould or clay save in the remote root meaning of a “plough”; ara to “aratrum.”

This was all late, but still genuine Avesta.

Then of the two last Archangels the one who represented the Water made it so sacred, that one could not cast saliva into it, nor could Ambassadors come over Sea to Rome, nor armies use sea-transport;—while the last watched over plants, presumably with much the same effect;—but neither of them meant internally any conceivable thing whatsoever of the sort.

Fancy one priest saying to another: “Pour some Divine Completeness, that was Haurvatāt, into this caldron, and put some Immortality, that was Ameretatāt, upon the Fire.” And this, as I say, even in the late but still genuine Avesta, not to speak of the later Zoroastrianism which was quite a different thing.

Even in the Gātha Vohuman, Vohumanah, clearly, though sublimely refers to “man,” while in the late Avesta he is so identified that Vohu manah, as the discreet citizen, could even be “defiled” by some bad touch. But it meant the Good Mind, as I say, and first of all of Deity. These Ameshaspends went everywhere, as I have implied above, as Ahura’s messengers and representatives: but just as inevitably they sometimes lost their first meanings in the way I show. Not always, and we may be thankful for it, not even in the later but still genuine Avesta, nor in the later Zoroastrianism. In times so late even as the Commentaries to the Yasna, and it is as singular as it is pleasing to observe it, everywhere the first ideas maintain themselves. Indeed the two phases above described showed themselves contemporaneously and even side by side, if not exactly from first to last, then at least from the second stage on indefinitely. Asha is seldom fire there in the comments, for Fire has its place apart, a high one; he was even “Mazda’s Son,” and has hymns to himself, though he is never an Amesha; he would be too “pagan” among the Seven. Asha is simply “Holiness” in the translations, with only occasional reference to the sense of “fire.”

Vohuman means for the most part exactly what it is in the translations, though the comments Pahlavi, Sanskrit and Persian, sometimes bring in his guardianship of men and animals, chiefly in Yasna I.

Khshathra seldom recalls the metals, while Aramaiti is broadly and distinctly the “perfect mind,” a most noteworthy particular, with no regular allusions whatever to the “earth”; this in the Commentaries, late or early; we seldom think of water, or trees there with Haurvatāt or Ameretatāt. The Waters, like the Fire,

were indeed most sacred, and have glowing Yashts; some of the finest pieces in the Books are to their glory; and so of the last; and this even in the late commentaries from the fifth to the ninth century and on, for the Pahlavi was forever being written over at the end of sentences, page by page.

And in this last sense the Angelology becomes indeed impressive throughout the periods.

Asha, as the Angel of the Holy Law, is the Holy Truth personified;—Bahman or Vohumanah is the Angel of Benevolence;—Khshathra is that of God's Sovereign Power, His Authority;—Aramaiti is that of His Activity in female form, His Daughter;—Haurvatāt is that of His Completeness;—Ameretatāt that of His Eternity. Where is their like in a refined literature; where at their date?

Our Semitic term "who like God?" *Mi-cha-el*, is but a question; fine indeed, but still a question. So Gabriel, "God's hero," has a manly ring; but in high worship we need close help, with more particulars.

We wish to know what the God whom we worship really is; and our Persian Angels answer us in terms magnificent—Asha is the Holy Truth enthroned and made illustrious, the Good Mind is similarly exalted; while as against Raphael, Uriel and the like, we have the rest, Khshathra, God's Sovereign Power, declared as no Angel elsewhere is, and His "ara"-mind, His working inspiration, is held up for all mankind to see and feel, while the last two show us almost points in our philosophy, for God's Completeness is a formulated consideration, while His Deathlessness declares His permanence; and this last as we may note in passing, is actually identical with "Immortality," for *amereta* is *Amorta*, i. e., immorta-, the suffix only differing; this too might be related.

Surely no thinker in a professor's study will be constructively indifferent to this. Here are six Attributes of God, constructively including everything which a Supreme Being can possess or be, the first principles of a moral Universe,—an incisive thing; and the plan it signifies is better than any other grouping of believed-in Spiritual Beings which may ever have preceded it. And as such these concepts ruled over vast territories from Afghanistan at least half across wide Asia to a province named from the Altar fires Adharbhagan,—Adhar being Fire.

Mi-cha-el never held sway like that in the older days, nor did Gabriel nor Uriel nor Raphael.

We scarcely hear of the four except in art,—while Gabriel swept Europe through the tender tales of Christmas. What sphere

then had the Jewish Angels in comparison with the Iranian? What populations by the million did they influence outside their settlements? Where especially before the Exile, is there even any trace of suchlike names? But Vohumanah ruled from India to Egypt, and from the Ocean to the Sea, on the wide Tableland of Iran; and so did Asha, Khshathra and the rest, and this in the first fresh meanings of the names as ideas personified. Even the Greeks knew what they meant so long ago as Theopompus B. C. 300, or at least as Plutarch. Even then Asha still meant *aletheia*, i. e., truth; see Plutarch—with not a thought of fire; Vohuman was “goodwill,” *eunoia*, with not a hint of men or cattle; Khshathra was “good law,” *eunomia*—no word of metals;—Aramaiti was *sopheia*, i. e., “wisdom,” near enough, from *-maiti* to the root “*man*,” “to think”; Haurvatāt was *plouton*, God of Wealth, not so very distant; while Ameretatāt was rather free, “our pleasure in things beautiful”; no water was seen in that, no plants in this.

Do we think all this a trifling matter because it is so simple? Its simplicity is its very passport,—its patent of nobility; if it were not simple, it would be all contemptible. What is so simple as the Gospel? Truth is never mixed. Or do we underrate it because its documents are scant? What is so scant as the fragments of Heraclitus? Or because it is not modern? Why, our whole Religion is “Antiquity.” We live and breathe in Genesis; and the world’s commerce rolls on with the Prophets and New Testament.

Some religious friend once wrote: “We know nothing of the Orient;—we are not scholars in it!” Every preacher who can read his Hebrew is a specialist in Orient;—and all the children in our schools are half the same. If we live and breathe in Daniel, the Gospels and the Apocalypse, surely we can spare an odd half hour for the “Anointed” Cyrus and his faith. The Reigns of Darius, Xerxes and Artaxerxes date our later Bibles, and should we pass them lightly over when their chief significance is their Religion?

To resume,—these things are keen, not dull when our attention is fully aroused to them;—Plato himself is dull to dullards. But I have something finer still to offer, a veritable curiosity of our literature, and one pre-eminent,—though subtle. Some of my readers may respond to it, and I must push it with all the point I can. Perhaps we do not like Archangels; and here are some which turn out to be God’s attributes, though beyond a doubt personified; and they are also “created” almost in the sense of Plutarch; but we have something deeper yet, *the actual things themselves, the ideas pure*

and unadulterated in the Gāthas lines, clear of anything whatsoever which can make them personal.

They are first clothed in the forms of rhetoric, speech-figure, rhetorical impersonation, like: "Grave! where is thy victory, O Death! where is thy sting"; which does not at all destroy their ideal character; they are here as pure as anywhere; but I do not need to cite them so. We have them clear of all figure whatsoever; effectual and beautiful as this figure is. It is *actually the fact that the so-called Archangels of the Gāthas are at times the strictest principles of righteousness*, for they are used in the common forms of grammar as mere nouns in the adverbial instrumental case, in the simplest forms of speech. God speaks "ashā," in no sense at all here meaning with his Archangel or helped on by him, but "with His Truth," "veraciously";—He wishes "Vohumananhā," not with the Great Ameshaspand, but "with His direct Benevolence";—He rules "Khshathrā," not with the Arm of His splendid Creature, but "with His Divine Authority";—He moves constructively "Aramaiti", i. e., "with His Inspiration," and not as encouraged by His daughter. He possesses "Haurvatāt," Completeness, and Ameretatāt, i. e., Eternity, by implication, and in the passages here meant never as living beings.

Here the very mental things themselves are uttered, and have their course with no help or hindrance whatsoever from any one of the impersonations. *The August Immortals are the common terms of language*, with the other uses however at the next breath or sentence. It is hard to believe it, but read the passages; they are few. The documents themselves are scant, though so weighty in the sense of higher thought. I have collected the special places in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 20. Where does the like appear? The personifications, as I say, occur, and this is the chief marvel of it, side by side with their linguistic uses, such as we ourselves might follow every moment, close beside them, alternated with them, and parallel; almost interwoven with them, as one might say;—so much so that it is often quite difficult, if not next to impossible to tell when Zarathushtra meant ashā "truly" in the common meaning of the noun—Ashā rhetorically as the figure "with His truth," or Ashā as the veritable Archangel of the Law. Nowhere in any literature do I remember such a thing. The ideas are positively, almost inextricably, interwoven in many a place, though the original force of them is never lost, either in the figure or the believed-in persons,—not in the Gāthas. Strange, and yet not strange to say, this very circumstance helps on my contention;

perhaps my friends can see it, too. Of course it shows a gross blunder in Zarathushtra's diction,—this great confusion in the sentences; in fact it is the crux of the Gáthic point, and long since so recognized, while it contains the secret of the theme. The ideas so filled the mind of the impassioned prophet, who had culled them out of the earlier lore, (see, too, the Veda,) that he could not keep them out of anything he wrote on a kindred subject; least of all out of these things personified. His ardor for justice especially carried the idea through every lineament and fibre of the form of Asha as the Angel, nor is it ever really lost sight of in many of the later reproductions of it through every age, as witness Plutarch. Nor does Zarathushtra ever name a single one of the other Five Beings without bearing in mind the things they symbolize,—so that at times we cannot tell whether he really means the Angel or the principle.

I will go one step further on beyond my colleagues and say, after all my studies, that Zarathushtra himself could not have always at a sudden sight of them have made clear his own intertwining thoughts, not even to himself. Had he laid his strophes by, forgotten them for the moment in his rush of cares, let them get "cold," as we might say of it, and then come suddenly upon them; he, Zarathushtra himself, I veritably believe, could not himself have always told at his first new glance at them which new thought was uppermost in the tangled sentences, the thought itself in its pure reason, or the supposed living Being, the spiritual Archangel who upheld the thought; that is to say, he could not have told this always.

I call this wonderful from my present point of view and also valuable, and I think that historians of religion will agree with me. Here is the first systematic grouping of such abstracts in the world's religious literature, and they are each and all of signal character.* I call it wonderful, for it shows how deeply the man was possessed with his noble purpose; and his followers agreed;—the hymns themselves were worshiped doubtless for this reason, and it is a good one.

What effects these hymns must have had on millions and throughout centuries! for "Truth" was held up in such a way as to attract the attention of the far-off Greeks, and give it strong influence. How can engineering, for example, thrive in a land with all things shuffled? Even the Tay Bridge broke down, they

*Think what fame Jonathan Edwards reaped in the History of Philosophy from that one great thought of his upon the human will.

say, for want of testing;—and then as to Judgment and the Law;—will any man, gifted with one iota of sagacity here needed, doubt for a moment that this creed had influence on justice and its administration.

Even the Greeks again reported this Persian aspiration to speak truth with the kindred manly instincts.

The Persians led the world as horsemen, and the Roman legions never felt their chances even till the Persian archers had shot all their shafts. No more virile figure existed upon Earth than Cyrus:—and look at Darius's *point* on Behistān. He goes straight at all his objects, and the tablets ring with curses on the Lie. Periods of degeneration of course ensued as they do everywhere,—but even the last Persian king made an astonishing struggle for existence. I call it wonderful indeed as the enthronement of the best instincts of our race.

In Veda we have the same ideas, often also not personified; and with a throng beside them left too in their simple state, but there they are loosely scattered, neglected as it were. Here they are compacted, selected, guarded and protected, focused, so to express it, made dominant, effective, consecrated; and above all, as the seal of them, made sacrosanct, for they are sacrificed, too, at times in the Yasna service as the most sacred objects in its course. Surely this lifts the Gāthas out of and above all such like competing schemes.

Where elsewhere, let me repeat the question, have we the like in literature save in its daughter systems? God, the Life—Spirit—Lord, Ahura, one of the noblest names well possible,—Mazda, the Great Creator, or as others say, “the Wise One”—and—with *His character!* *What* would He be without it?—though divided in six attributes; and this at a time when Jupiter was beating His annoying spouse, and Indra hiccupping from too much Soma! We do not worship God because He is a person; but because He is Supreme in Truth, with Love and Power, Eternal, Active and Complete.