

MEMRA, SHEKINAH, METATRON.<sup>1</sup>

It seems worth while to draw special attention in the JOURNAL to this important paper by Prof. G. F. Moore, because many students of the Gospels, not specially interested in Rabbinical lore, might fail to realize from its title that it has to do with an all too popular method of dealing with the beginnings of the doctrine of the Johannine Logos.

Most writers are accustomed to derive the idea of the *Logos*, that comes before us so abruptly at the beginning of the Fourth Gospel, from Philo or the Stoics: in either case from something essentially Greek. Another school of expositors have attempted to regard the Johannine Logos as a Jewish idea, which is supposed to be traceable in the use of the term *Memra* (usually translated 'Word') in the Aramaic Targums. 'The belief in a divine Word, a mediating Power by which God makes Himself known to men in action and teaching, was not confined to any one school at the time of Christ's coming. It . . . moulded the language of the Targums. . . . In Palestine the Word appears, like the Angel of the Pentateuch, as the medium of the outward communication of God with men.' So Dr Westcott (*Introd. to the Study of the Gospels*, 6th ed., p. 151), who goes on to speak of 'the recognition of a twofold personality in the divine Essence', and the teaching of Dr Westcott, derived, I suppose, mainly from Schöttgen, has often been re-echoed in later days by writers who have not been so careful to keep close to the words of their authorities.

The main object of Prof. Moore is to shew that the use of *Memra* in the Targums has nothing whatever to do with the use of *Logos* in the Fourth Gospel, or in any other Greek composition. He points out that the Targumists are not so much concerned with the elimination of anthropomorphic ideas which occur in the Hebrew Scriptures, as with the avoidance of certain anthropomorphic expressions. It is misleading to translate *memra* by 'the Word', with a capital letter (p. 45). Moreover, 'the *memra* of the Lord' in the Targums does not correspond to 'the word of the Lord' (דבר יהוה) in Hebrew, e. g. Gen. xv 1, Isa. xl 8: 'wherever the "word of the Lord" is the medium or instrumentality of revelation, or of communication to men, in Greek λόγος or ῥήμα, the term employed for this medium in the Targums is not *memrā*, but *pitgāmā*, or (as in Psalm xxxiii 6) *millā*' (p. 46). 'God's *memrā* has sometimes the connotation of command—we might in imitation of the

<sup>1</sup> 'Intermediaries in Jewish Theology (Memra, Shekinah, Metatron)', by George Foot Moore: reprinted from the *Harvard Theological Review*, Jan. 1922.

etymology say "edict"—the expression of his will which is an effective force in nature and providence; sometimes it might best be translated "oracle", the revelation of his will or purpose (not, however, a specific word of prophecy); sometimes it is the resolution of a metaphor for God's power, his protection, and the like. In many instances it is clearly introduced as a verbal buffer—one of many such in the Targums—to keep God from seeming to come to too close quarters with men and things; but it is always a buffer-word, not a buffer-idea; still less a buffer-person' (p. 53). 'The sum of the whole matter is that nowhere in these Targums is *memrā* a "being" of any kind or in any sense, whether conceived personally as an angel employed in communication with men, or as a philosophically impersonal created potency' (p. 53, end). '*Memrā* is found only in the Targums; not in such Aramaic texts as are preserved in the Midrashim, nor in the voluminous Aramaic parts of the Talmuds, nor, so far as I am aware, in the Zohar. In other words, it is a phenomenon of translation, not a creature of speculation' (p. 54).

'Like *memrā*, *shekīnāh* acquires what semblance of personality it has solely by being a circumlocution for God in contexts where personal states or actions are attributed to him' (p. 59).

In the second part of this study Prof. Moore gives convincing reasons for believing that the old traditional view of the derivation of *Metatrōn* is correct, viz. that it is nothing more than the Latin word *metator*, i. e. 'pioneer', a military word like 'legion' and 'street', which it is not surprising to find taken over by a Palestinian dialect. He rejects the modern derivations from Mithra and from Metathronos and Metatyrranos. The original function of Metatron was to conduct the Israelites across the desert, and it is sometimes a name for Michael. In later Jewish Cabbalistic speculation the name is used for a sort of emanation of God, but Metatron is never in function or in essence an 'intermediary' or 'mediator' (p. 79).

These quotations of Prof. Moore's leading conclusions will shew that neither *memra* nor *metatron* have anything to do with the Johannine λόγος. From whatever channel the Fourth Evangelist derived his ideas or his phraseology, this paper shews that it is useless to look for the explanation in the *memra* of the Targums or the *metatron* of the Talmud. The paper is therefore cordially to be recommended to that large number of Christian scholars who have to take their ideas about Rabbinical thought at second hand from popular works on the religion and the thought of the Synagogue.