

Coptic Apocrypha.

BY THE REV. CANON J. A. MACCULLOCH, D.D., BRIDGE OF ALLAN.

APOCRYPHAL writings always contain treasures whether for the theologian, the student of comparative religion or folk-lore, or the literary historian. This volume of Coptic texts is no exception to the rule.¹ Dr. Budge gives the texts of six documents, with a translation and a valuable introduction. In this last he shows how frequently the ideas of Egyptian paganism are borrowed in Coptic documents, especially those dealing with the Other-world. Some of these writings, however, are doubtless from Greek originals, and much of their subject-matter is common to the mass of early Christian literature. The preoccupation of many of these documents is with the Other-world, regarding which there was an intense curiosity in the first Christian centuries—a curiosity amply gratified. There are experiences of the dead in the Other-world, visits of Apostles thither, a minute narrative of the *Descensus*, a description of the Resurrection, and the like. The documents have a Gnostic flavour, like most early Coptic writings. But they probably did not emanate from Gnostic circles. They belong to that popular Christianity which was perhaps nearly as much Gnostic as it was orthodox, and which had also a strong element of paganism.

A favourite idea of early Apocrypha is that of the appearance of Christ on the Mount of Olives, and the journey thither of the Apostles on a cloud sent to gather them from the regions in which they were working. This is found in one of the documents printed by Dr. Budge, *The Mysteries of St. John*. It introduces the main narrative, the journey of the Apostle to the heavens on a cherub. He visits the first heaven and sees the twelve rulers of the years, and discovers that the water which waters the earth is under the feet of the Father, the supply being regulated by His feet. It existed before heaven and earth: God alone knows who created it. The idea of a fountain flowing from beneath the throne of a god is found in many mythologies: this instance seems to be of Egyptian *provenance*. So also is the next

problem solved for the Apostle, namely, the origin of wheat. Adam after the Fall was hungry. Christ took a piece of His flesh and rubbed it down into small pieces. The Father took a portion of His own body and changed it to a grain of wheat. This latter was given to Adam by Michael. Dr. Budge traces this to the Egyptian myth that wheat was made of the body of the god Pautti and of the body of Osiris, who was often identified with Pautti. St. John is next taken to the seventh heaven, where other natural phenomena are explained to him, and afterwards to Eden in the place of the sun-rising. There he sees the tree of which Adam ate, now bare of all fruit. Adam himself is also seen sweeping up leaves and burying them. Before the Fall, leaves did not drop from the trees. The great stature possessed by Adam before the Fall is also described. This is a Rabbinic idea, found again in another of these documents, where also the description of Adam is suggestive of the Gnostic Primal Man. At last St. John's curiosity is fully satisfied, and he is brought back to the Mount of Olives, and relates these wonders to the Apostles.

Another heaven journey is found in the *Encomium of John the Baptist* ascribed to St. Chrysostom. Here also the ascent is made from the Mount of Olives, but by all the Apostles on a cloud of light together with Christ. They are not allowed to enter any of the seven heavens, save the third—a species of Paradise. Paradise in the third heaven is found also in 2 Co 12^{1f}, in the *Secrets of Enoch* and in the *Apocalypse of Paul*. In this Paradise St. John Baptist and his parents are found in great splendour, and the joys prepared for the faithful are fully described. Every one, however, must first pass through a sea of fire. But to St. John has been given a golden boat, by which they traverse it in safety, apparently by oars working automatically. In each oar is a lamp to guide souls through the darkness. Dr. Budge cites an Egyptian parallel as the source of this—the boat of the celestial ferryman who conveyed the righteous dead to heaven. A magical boat covering long distances in a moment occurs also in the *Acts of Andrew and Matthias*. Its captain is Christ, for the appearance of Christ in various

¹ *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*. Edited with English Translations, by E. A. Wallis Budge, M.A., Litt.D. With 58 plates. Printed by Order of the Trustees. Sold at the British Museum, 1913.

forms is a commonplace of the Apocryphal Acts. There are similar magic boats of swiftness in Celtic mythology. Paradise is described in the usual terms—meadows of asphodel, gentle streams, trees with all kinds of fruit, delectable odours, and here too is the vine with 10,000 bunches of grapes, each bunch yielding six *métritès* of wine. Fig-trees, palm-trees, apple-trees, and corn are equally fruitful. Perhaps this is borrowed from the account of the Millennial vines in the *Book of Enoch*.

Another document given here is *The Life of Pisentius*, a sixth-century saint. This contains much of interest, but its most striking incident is his conversation with a mummy, treated with greater realism than Poe's jesting 'Words with a Mummy.' The terrors of the soul's journey, the encounters with horrible beasts, monsters, and evil angels, and the grisly horrors of the Pit, are described. Each soul is bitten by the Worm every day except Saturday and Sunday. The prayers of Pisentius have caused the soul of the mummy to be released for a time, and now he begs his prayers for lasting release from Amenti. Pisentius promises that God will show mercy to him, and the mummy is bidden to lie down in peace till the Resurrection. A parallel story occurs in the Life of Macarius who raised up a man after he had been six hours dead, whereupon he described the horrors of Amenti in similar terms. There is a further parallel to this in one of Dr. Budge's texts—*The Book of the Resurrection*. In this a son of St. Thomas is raised from death by the Apostle, whose absence from the first Resurrection appearance is thus explained, but who, in spite of his own powers, is afterwards the doubting Apostle. Siôphanes, the youth restored to life, tells how his soul passed unscathed through the river of fire and was bathed in the Lake Akherousia, and afterwards saw Paradise and the rewards laid up for the Apostles. These include twelve white robes—the Robes of Light of many early Christian and Gnostic documents, and probably intended for a kind of spiritual body, as in a similar instance in the *Ascension of Isaiah*.

This *Book of the Resurrection* purports to be written by St. Bartholomew, and contains one of the most realistic accounts of the Descent to Hades in early Christian writings, not excepting that in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. This account belongs to that form of the tradition in which all

the descendants of Adam are rescued from Hades, not merely the faithful of the Old Testament. Three persons alone are left in the abyss—Judas, Cain, and Herod. There is another document in which the fate of Judas is referred to in connexion with the Descent—the *Acts of Paul and Andrew*, in which St. Paul descends to Hades through the sea and finds there no one but Judas, who had been left there because he paid allegiance to the devil. In this *Book of the Resurrection* the description of the Resurrection by Philogenes, who witnessed it, is very vivid. Innumerable angels, Cherubim, Seraphim, and Powers are present, as well as a great chariot of fire. The Father comes down through the opening heavens and raises Christ, who ascends in the chariot. Various appearances after the Resurrection are described, but the most curious passage in the *Book* is one describing a celebration of the Eucharist by the Apostles. It is unfortunately mutilated, but we gather that Christ appears among them and takes His place on the table. 'His Body was on the table [about] which they were gathered together, and they divided it. They saw the Blood of Jesus pouring out as living blood down into the cup.' Then they partake of the Body and Blood. This is an extraordinarily materialistic passage, but it has parallels in the document itself where it describes how the Apostles are sealed with the actual Blood taken from the Body of the Risen Christ. There is also a considerable exaltation of the Virgin in this document. Christ stretches out His right hand and blesses her womb; a hand of fire appears from heaven (the hand of the Trinity) and rests on her breast and womb; her future glory is announced, and Christ promises that He and the Father and the angels will take her soul to heaven, while Cherubim and twelve hundred angels will guard her body until the day of His appearing. This suggests an earlier date for this document than that of the *Transitus Marie* (fourth century, according to Tischendorf), in which her assumption is described.

There are many other points of great interest in this volume, but these will suffice to show its value. Dr. Budge has spared no pains in making it complete. His introduction is most valuable, so also are his indices of Scripture passages, of Coptic forms of Greek words, of names of persons, countries, etc., and of foreign words. There are also 58 plates of reproductions of these MSS.