

ST. PAUL'S VIEW OF THE GREEK GODS.

LAST Easter (1894) Dr. Willibald Beyschlag published a "Programme," entitled "Hat der Apostel Paulus die Heidengötter für Dämonen gehalten?" In this pamphlet he makes it his aim to show that the free Greek atmosphere which the apostle breathed, his preference of the Old Testament to later Jewish tradition, and especially the purity and dignity of his Christian thinking, saved him from a superstition which was pretty widely prevalent in his day, and prevented him from thinking of the Greek gods as Demons.

*Δαιμόνιον* is the neuter of *δαιμόνιος*, used as a substantive; and receives its meaning from *δαίμων*, which, by Homer and Greek writers generally, is used as an equivalent of *θεός*. With Pindar and Sophocles Truth, Justice, Modesty are Demons. The Demon of Socrates is a spiritual influence, an inward warning voice. Among the Hebrews the idea of intermediary beings was acceptable, as helping them to understand the existence of evil, and it was natural that to such evil intermediaries or angels the name Demons should be applied. Accordingly, although the prophets spoke with contempt of the idols of the heathen as non-entities, yet where this high superiority was not maintained the heathen were spoken of as worshipping Demons. And thus where the original Hebrew text speaks of worshipping idols, or "nothings," the LXX. translates by *δαιμόνια* (Deut. xxxii, 17; Ps. xcvi. 5, etc.).

Among the early fathers the same tendency is discernible. Justin Martyr speaks of the Demons as being the product of the Angels and women (Genesis vi.), and hence their evil influence on men. Athenagoras believed they had been men. Minucius Felix identifies them with Jupiter, Saturn,

and the rest. Some of the apologists, however, such as Arnobius and the author of the Epistle to Diognetus, maintained the Old Testament prophetic standpoint, and held idols to be nothing but wood and stone. The Book of Wisdom also depicts the absolute nothingness of the heathen objects of worship.

The passage round which the discussion of Paul's view has ranged is 1 Corinthians x. 14-22. [Our R.V. translates "devils" throughout]. Dr. Beyschlag paves the way for interpreting this *locus classicus* by observing that Paul nowhere else uses *δαιμόνια* of evil spirits or fallen angels. He speaks of such but as *πνευματικὰ πονηρίας* (Ephesians vi. 1); he is aware of an *ἄγγελος Σατανᾶ* (2 Cor. xii. 7) of *ἀρχαί, ἐξουσίαι, δυνάμεις*, but not of *δαιμόνια*. In Acts xvii. 18, he is supposed to be *ξένων δαιμονίων καταγγελεὺς εἶναι*, a preacher of strange *gods*; precisely as Socrates had been accused of introducing *καινὰ δαιμόνια*. Here it is evident that *δαιμόνια* means "gods." We should naturally expect then that in 1 Corinthians x. the same meaning would suffice.

The words in question are especially those of the 20th and 21st verses: "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, not to God," etc. His argument is: he who partakes of the Lord's supper proclaims himself a member of Christ's body, and he who partakes of a heathen sacrificial meal participates in an idolatrous act, and becomes a guest of the gods. That is to say, participation in such a meal is participation in the worship of the gods of the heathen, an act of idolatry. This is all, and no reference to demons as real beings, whether evil angels or the spirits of dead men, is admissible.

Indeed, as if to obviate the possibility of misunderstanding, he says in the 19th verse: "What say I then? that a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? [Certainly not.] Christ, His body and blood

are objective, spiritual realities, and the readers might, from the comparison he draws between these and the idols, be in danger of inferring that the idols also are realities. Therefore he says the food offered and the idol itself were not anything. He could not mean that the food had no existence nor that the stone image had no existence: he could only mean that any presumed presence behind the image, any actual spirit of evil receiving the offering was nothing. He denies to the idols all reality beyond the sensible appearance. He who occupies this point of view, that the gods of the heathen have no existence at all, cannot at the same time hold that they are demons.

In the eighth chapter of the same epistle he similarly affirms that an idol is nothing in the world. Some of the Corinthians shrank from eating sacrificial food, because, "being used until now to the idol, they eat as of a thing sacrificed unto an idol"; that is, they feel as if carried back into heathenism in spite of their knowledge that the idol is nothing. In the 5th verse of the chapter he might seem to admit the reality of the *λεγόμενοι θεοί* first with *εἶπερ* as possible, and then with *ὥσπερ* as actual. It might be said that it is only *Divine* reality he denies to them. But supposing this were so, it does not support the idea that the heathen gods were demons; for it is *θεοί*, not *δαιμόνια*, Paul here speaks of, and if the latter are conceived of as evil spirits they cannot be designated *θεοί*. Besides, they are spoken of as *εἶτε ἐν οὐρανῷ*, but heaven, neither among Jews or Greeks, is ever thought of as the abode of demons. In point of fact the reality which Paul here ascribes to the heathen gods is their existence in the belief and worship of the nations. And the logical advance from the *εἶπερ* clause to the *ὥσπερ* clause does not consist in his first affirming an objective reality as possible, and then as actual, but it lies in the emphatically repeated *πολλοί*; that which is first hypothetically affirmed is abundantly actual, the world in which

the Apostle lives is full of gods and lords. They exist *e persuasione gentium*.

The passage in which the origin and character of idolatry is most fully handled by Paul is Romans i. 21-25. And in this passage it is referred, not to the deluding power of fallen angels, but to human sin and culpable ignorance.

On all these grounds it is time that this idea, that the great apostle of the Gentiles believed that the gods of the Greeks were demons, vanished from our exegesis.

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