

INDIA AND THE APOSTLE THOMAS.

India and the Apostle Thomas. An Inquiry. With a Critical Analysis of the Acta Thomae. By A. E. MEDLYCOTT, Bishop of Tricomia. (London, D. Nutt, 1905.) [pp. xviii + 303: twelve plates and a map.]

BISHOP MEDLYCOTT has put together a great deal of interesting information from various sources, tending to support the tradition of St Thomas's Indian apostolate and of his martyrdom at Mylapore. But the general impression left upon the reviewer's mind is a confused one. We can follow the author with pleasure in his tracking of the Indian tradition through the mediæval period, in his *résumé* of the present state of knowledge with regard to King Gondophares, and in his account of the removal of the Apostle's relics to Edessa, Chios and Ortona. We must be grateful to him for his illustrations and condole with him on the misprint which describes the interesting sculptured tympanum at Semur as stained glass, while we admire his industry and sympathize with his championship of a very venerable and attractive story. But when we come to the appendix in which he analyses the Acts of Thomas and tries to sift out from the midst of 'Gnostic' accretions a residuum of true history, we cannot help feeling that he is undertaking a hopeless task. His theory of the Acts is that they not only contain names of historical personages (as King Gondophares), but that several of the episodes and the martyrdom are in the main true: and that the book has suffered extensively from Gnostic interpolation. 'Fortunately', he says on p. 291, 'a German scholar, who has made a special study of Gnostic writings, and is considered a great authority on the subject, von (*sic*) Carl Schmidt (*Die alten Petrusakten*, &c.) has arrived at the conclusion that of the Acts of Peter, Paul, John, Thomas, and Andrew, which in the time of Photius were attributed to Lucius (*sic*) Charinus, all, even those of John, are by more or less orthodox Catholics: certainly none are of Gnostic origin. . . . It is satisfactory to find others coming to the views we hold.' Dr Schmidt, I think, would be surprised and amused at the manner in which his theories are interpreted by the Bishop.

A good deal of space is devoted to an examination of the Acts of Thecla, and here again the Bishop has contrived to leave on my mind an odd impression of his views as to the relation of the various versions. I do not find evidence that he realizes that the Coptic is a translation of a Greek text, of which, indeed, singularly little notice is taken. Gnostic interpolation is postulated in this case also, and the Pilgrimage of 'Silvia' is quoted as a 'testimony to the authenticity of the *Acta*

Theclae'. It is also argued that the Acts of Thecla were incorporated bodily by the author of the Acts of Paul into his work.

On p. 111 is a passage which shews the really misleading character of the whole investigation. 'The lady pilgrim (of the *Peregrinatio Silviae*) paid a . . . visit to the shrine of . . . St Thecla ; and there . . . she read . . . the acts of her martyrdom. We need hardly remark that these would not be the distorted Gnostic edition that has come down to us, but a copy of the Acts accepted and recognized as catholic and genuine by the Christians of that age. The remark applies with equal force to the Acts of Thomas, which she records that she had read at his shrine. This offers clear proof that these were copies which had not been distorted and utilized for Gnostic purposes, as we find is the case with those that have come down to us.' The Bishop's conclusions here would simply be met with flat contradiction. There is no evidence at all that the Acts either of Thecla or of Thomas which the pilgrim read differed in doctrinal complexion from those which we possess now and which the Bishop calls Gnostic. If they did so differ, it was because they had been revised in the Catholic interest. The assumption of later Church writers that Gnostics had tampered with originally orthodox writings runs directly counter to everything that can be gathered from the documents themselves, and is simply a falsification of history. It was not an unnatural assumption for a writer of the fifth century ; but any one who seeks to revive it now is doing very poor service to the cause of truth. And to say that the passage from the *Peregrinatio* offers 'clear proof' of any kind as to the character of the text of the Acts is nothing short of ridiculous.

On p. 120 Heracleon's denial that St Thomas was a martyr is discussed, and dismissed on very insufficient grounds.

Such Greek phrases as appear in the book contain more misprints than they should, and I seem to detect a propensity on the part of the author to make use of Latin versions of Greek documents : for example, the epitaph of Abercius is quoted in Latin.

I cannot, in conclusion, accept this book as a successful critical study either of the Acts of Thomas or of the Indian tradition ; but it has interested me more than a little.

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