

## The Wise Men from the East.

BY LOUIS H. GRAY, M.A., PH.D., SOMETIME FELLOW IN INDO-IRANIAN IN  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK.

THE account of the *μάγοι ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν*, who, having 'seen His star in the east,' came to worship the newborn King of the Jews, renders of exceptional interest to the Biblical student any scholarly study of the religion which these 'wise men' professed; and the importance of the theme is enhanced in view of the fact that many would attribute to this religion such vital doctrines of the Jewish and Christian faith as the belief in angels, Satan, and the resurrection and final judgment of the dead, which are often alleged to have been received by the Jews from the Persians during the Exile. These allegations have been made almost wholly by Old Testament scholars who have possessed an inadequate knowledge of the Iranian sources, and who have not distinguished with sufficient care between the older and the younger strata of Iranism, a system which underwent profound modifications in its long history. It is significant that Iranists have been far more cautious in granting the possibility of such sweeping influences upon Judaism and Christianity, though they, too, have not been guiltless of hasty and superficial deductions, besides labouring under the handicap of insufficient training in that special knowledge of Biblical problems which is essential for a just verdict. In Professor James Hope Moulton the theologian and the Iranist are combined, and in his Hibbert Lectures on *Early Zoroastrianism* we possess a contribution of the utmost value not only to the Iranian specialist, but also to the student of Judaism and portions of Christianity.

Professor Moulton argues strongly for the historicity of Zoroaster as portrayed in the Gāthās, the oldest portion (at least in written form) of the Avesta, or sacred texts of Zoroastrianism, and he is inclined to place him about the eleventh century B.C., though it must be confessed that this seems rather early. The propaganda began, according to him, in Bactria, and spread but slowly, being the faith of the select few, as was but natural in view of its lofty character. Among the confessors of the Zoroastrian reform Professor Moulton numbers Darius the Great. This is a problem on which the reviewer has been forced long ago to come to

a contrary opinion; yet if he still remains unconvinced, even with the one new argument advanced by Professor Moulton—that Cyrus named his daughter Atossa, the Avesta *Hutaošā*, which was also the name of the queen of Vištāspa, Zoroaster's royal patron, whose name is identical with that of Hystaspes, the father of Darius—he feels that in the volume under consideration is one of the ablest pleas yet made for the Zoroastrianism of the Achæmenian monarch. Whether Professor Moulton is right in interpreting the statement of the Susianian version of the Achæmenian inscriptions, that Ahura Mazda is the 'god of the Aryans,' to mean that he was the god only of 'the nobles of Aryan race . . . who had taken up the new cult' (referring especially to the fact that, according to Herodotus, the *ἀριζαυτοί* were but one of the six Median tribes), may perhaps be questioned.

The Zoroastrian reform, however, passed, except for the abiding texts of the Gāthās, and the older Iranian nature worship reclaimed its own. By the first half of the fourth century a religion much like that of the Avesta Yašt was established at the Persian court, and Zoroaster had undergone a quasi-apotheosis, while the great popular deities Haoma and Mithra, whom Zoroaster had put aside as incompatible with his lofty ethics, had returned.

There is a third layer in the Avesta—the Vendidad and other ritual material. This, Professor Moulton holds, was the work of the Magi, and herein lies the new theory which may result in little short of a revolution in the concept of Zoroastrianism. It was the Magi who brought the religion of Iran to the knowledge of the Greeks, at least after the time of Herodotus, who reports chiefly (though not entirely) the real Iranism. This antithesis between Iranism and Magism had been adumbrated before, as by Spiegel (*Erân. Alterthumskunde*, iii. 585 ff.) and Prášek (*Gesch. der Meder und Perser*, ii. 115–118), but it has been reserved for Professor Moulton to estimate the true significance of the distinction, which may have implications for some of the well-known *Mischreligionen* of Western Asia. Among the

contributions of Magism to Iranism are the exposure of the dead instead of burying them (burial was known among the Persians, and Herodotus had already noted the divergence between Persians and Magians in this regard), marriage of near kin (especially brother and sister), the malignancy of planets and mountains, astrology and oneiromancy, with other forms of magic with which the name *μάγος* is so closely associated, and the minute dualism which permeates all late Zoroastrianism, though in the *Gāthās* it is scarcely more emphasized than in Christianity. They did away with the chthonic cults of Iranism, and rose from a humble status to be its priests. The theory is advanced that the Magi were neither Indo-Germanic nor Semitic; but of what race they were Professor Moulton has apparently been able to form no final opinion. Further research among the tribes of Central Asia may cast light upon this problem, which is of much importance for his theory. One point, omitted by him, might be suggested. He states that their additions to the Avesta 'seem to have been in prose.' But the prose, especially in the *Vendidad*, is full of impossible grammar. This is usually explained by the assumption that in the late period the rules of Avesta grammar had been forgotten; but it may be because the Magi never learned to write Avesta correctly, so that their additions, having a sacrosanct character, were transmitted on the same plane with the most correct *Gāthic* verse. We should also be glad to know more about another people mentioned in the Avesta, the Turanians, who were doubtless, at least in the main, Iranians, being the nomads (like the Scyths, with whom, indeed, they may possibly have been identical) as contrasted with the agricultural and cattle-rearing Zoroastrians. On the whole, there seems little likelihood that the Magi were Iranian; and Professor Moulton is to be felicitated upon the genius with which he

divined his theory and on the scholarship with which he has sought to establish it.

An entire chapter is devoted to the Fravashis, which have a special interest for the New Testament student in view of Mt 18<sup>10</sup> and Ac 12<sup>15</sup>. These figures are traced back to a combination of ancestor worship and the belief in the external soul.

The theologian will turn with most interest to the last chapter, on 'Zarathushtra and Israel.' The saneness of the author is evident when he says:

'In most of these points [of similarity between Zoroastrianism and Christianity] independence is so obvious that we shall not be troubled with suspicions of borrowing. Coincidences will be the independent agreement of deep thinkers upon the same great problems, and their independence will enhance their suggestiveness.'

Professor Moulton is inclined to see the influence of the Fravashis in the 'princes' of the nations in Daniel and in the 'angels of the churches' in the Apocalypse, as well as in Mt 18<sup>10</sup> and Ac 12<sup>15</sup>; and to think that a tendency toward angelology among the Jews may have been fostered by their Persian surroundings; perhaps also in the development of Satan 'a hint was given [by the Persians] and used, but used in a wholly original and characteristic way.' Finally, Judæo-Christian apocalyptic literature may show some traces of Iranian influence. All this is a welcome reduction of the debt ascribed to Zoroastrianism; and perhaps later research will reduce it to nothing.

To his volume Professor Moulton has appended a translation of the *Gāthās* and of some of the principal Greek texts on the Persians, in both cases with valuable notes. Indeed, only one point of real value seems to have been omitted—the fact that there were Magas (probably Magians) in India. The material on them, contained in the *Bhavisya Purāna* and the *Bṛhatsamhitā*, might well have been considered.

## In the Study.

### Mountains in the Mist.

Is this a volume of sermons? Its title does not signify so. But why not discover a new type of sermon with a new type of title? And why not make the

discovery at the Antipodes? 'The Rev. Frank W. Boreham is a minister in Hobart, Tasmania. His new book, under the above title, is published in this country by Mr. Kelly (3s. 6d. net). Here is one of its chapters. If it is a sermon, the text is at the end.