

### III.

#### THE GOSPEL OF EVE.

THE immoral tendency of Valentinianism broke out in coarse, flagrant licentiousness as soon as the doctrines of the sect had soaked down out of the stratum of educated men to the ranks of the undisciplined and vulgar.

Valentinianism assumed two forms, broke into two sects,—the Marcosians and the Ophites.

Mark, who lived in the latter half of the second century, came probably from Palestine, as we may gather from his frequent use of forms from the Aramæan liturgy. But he did not bring with him any of the Judaizing spirit, none of the grave reverence for the moral law, and decency of the Nazarene, Ebionite and kindred sects sprung from the ruined Church of the Hebrews.

He was followed by trains of women whom he corrupted, and converted into prophetesses. His custom was, in an assembly to extend a chalice to a woman saying to her, "The grace of God, which excels all, and which the mind cannot conceive or explain, fill all your inner man, and increase his knowledge in you, dropping the grain of mustard-seed into good ground."<sup>1</sup> A scene like a Methodist revival followed. The woman was urged to speak in prophecy; she hesitated, declared her inability; warm, passionate appeals followed closely one on another, couched in equivocal language, exciting the

<sup>1</sup> Epiphan. *Hæres.* xxxiv. 1; Iren. *Hær.* i. 9.

religious and natural passions simultaneously. The end was a convulsive fit of incoherent utterings, and the curtain fell on the rapturous embraces of the prophet and his spiritual bride.

Mark possessed a Gospel, and "an infinite number of apocryphal Scriptures," says Irenæus. The Gospel contained a falsified life of Christ. One of the stories from it he quotes. When Jesus was a boy, he was learning letters. The master said, "Say Alpha." Jesus repeated after him, "Alpha." Then the master said, "Say Beta." But Jesus answered, "Nay, I will not say Beta till you have explained to me the meaning of Alpha."<sup>1</sup> The Marcosians made much of the hidden mysteries of the letters of the alphabet, showing that Mark had brought with him from Palestine something akin to the Cabalism of the Jewish rabbis.

This story is found in the apocryphal Gospel of St. Thomas. It runs somewhat differently in the different versions of that Gospel, and is repeated twice in each with slight variations.

In the Syriac :

"Zacchæus the teacher said to Joseph, I will teach the boy Jesus whatever is proper for him to learn. And he made him go to school. And he, going in, was silent. But Zacchæus the scribe began to tell him (the letters) from Alaph, and was repeating to him many times the whole alphabet. And he says to him that he should answer and say after him; but he was silent. Then the scribe became angry, and struck him with his hand upon his head. And Jesus said, A smith's anvil, being beaten, can (not) learn, and it has no feeling; but I am able to say those things, recited by you, with knowledge and understanding (unbeaten)."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Iren. i. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Wright : Syriac Apocrypha, Lond. 1865, pp. 8—10.

In the Greek:

"Zacchæus said to Joseph . . . Give thy son to me, that he may learn letters, and with his letters I will teach him some knowledge, and chiefly this, to salute all the elders, and to venerate them as grandfathers and fathers, and to love those of his own age. And he told him all the letters from Alpha to Omega. Then, looking at the teacher Zacchæus, he said to him, Thou that knowest not Alpha naturally, how canst thou teach Beta to others? Thou hypocrite! if thou knowest, teach Alpha first, and then we shall believe thee concerning Beta."<sup>1</sup>

Or, according to another Greek version, after Jesus has been delivered over by Joseph to Zacchæus, the preceptor

"—wrote the alphabet in Hebrew, and said to him, Alpha. And the child said, Alpha. And the teacher said again, Alpha. And the child said the same. Then again a third time the teacher said, Alpha. Then Jesus, looking at the instructor, said, Thou knowest not Alpha; how wilt thou teach another the letter Beta? And the child, beginning at Alpha, said of himself the twenty-two letters. Then he said again, Hearken, teacher, to the arrangement of the first letter, and know how many accessories and lines it hath, and marks which are common, transverse and connected. And when Zacchæus heard such accounts of one letter, he was amazed, and could not answer him."<sup>2</sup>

Another version of the same story is found in the Gospel of the pseudo-Matthew:

"Joseph and Mary coaxing Jesus, led him to the school, that he might be taught his letters by the old man, Levi. When he entered he was silent; and the master, Levi, told one letter to Jesus, and beginning at the first, Aleph, said to

<sup>1</sup> Tischendorf: Codex Apocr. N. T.; Evang. Thom. i. c. 6, 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ii. c. 7; Latin Evang. Thom. iii. c. 6, 12.

him, Answer. But Jesus was silent, and answered nothing. Wherefore, the preceptor Levi, being angry, took a rod of a storax-tree, and smote him on the head. And Jesus said to the teacher Levi, Why dost thou smite me? Know in truth that he who is smitten teacheth him that smiteth, rather than is taught by him. . . . And Jesus added, and said to Levi, Every letter from Aleph to Tau is known by its order; thou, therefore, say first what is Tau, and I will tell thee what Aleph is. And he added, They who know not Aleph, how can they say Tau, ye hypocrites? First say what Aleph is, and I shall then believe you when you say Beth. And Jesus began to ask the names of the separate letters, and said, Let the teacher of the Law say what the first letter is, or why it hath many triangles, scalene, acute-angled, equilinear, curvi-linear," &c.<sup>1</sup>

At the root of Mark's teaching there seems to have been a sort of Pantheism. He taught that all had sprung from a great World-mother, partook of her soul and nature; but over against this female principle stood the Deity, the male element.

Man represents the Deity, woman the world element; and it is only through the union of the divine and the material that the material can be quickened into spiritual life. In accordance with this theory, they had a ceremonial of what he called spiritual, but was eminently carnal, marriage, which is best left undescribed.

Not widely removed from the Marcosians was the Valentinian sect of the Ophites. Valentinianism mingled with the floating superstition, the fragments of the wreck of Sabianism, which was to be found among the lower classes.

The Ophites represented the Demiurge in the same way as did the Valentinians. They called the God of this world and of the Jews by the name of Jaldaboth.

<sup>1</sup> Pseud. Matt. c. 31.

He was a limited being, imposing restraint on all his creatures; he exercised his power by imposing law. As long as his creatures obeyed law, they were subject to his dominion. But above Jaldaboth in the sublime region without limit reigns the Supreme God. When Adam broke the Law of the World-God, he emancipated himself from his bondage, he passed out of his realm, he placed himself in relation to the Supreme God.

The world is made by Jaldaboth, but in the world is infused a spark of soul, emanated from the highest God. This divine soul strives after emancipation from the bonds imposed by connection with matter, created by the God of this world. This world-soul under the form of a serpent urged Eve to emancipate herself from thralldom, and pass with Adam, by an act of transgression, into the glorious liberty of the sons of the Supreme God.

The doctrine of the Ophites with respect to Christ was that of Valentine. Christ came to break the last chains of Law by which man was bound, and to translate him into the realm of grace where sin does not exist.

The Ophites possessed a Gospel, called the "Gospel of Eve." It contained, no doubt, an account of the Fall from their peculiar point of view. St. Epiphanius has preserved two passages from it. They are so extraordinary, and throw such a light on the doctrines of this Gospel, that I quote them. The first is:

"I was planted on a lofty mountain, and lo! I beheld a man of great stature, and another who was mutilated. And then I heard a voice like unto thunder. And when I drew near, he spake with me after this wise: I am thou, and thou art I. And wheresoever thou art, there am I, and I am dispersed through all. And wheresoever thou wilt, there

canst thou gather me; but in gathering me, thou gatherest thyself."<sup>1</sup>

The meaning of this passage is not doubtful. It expresses the doctrine of absolute identity between Christ and the believer, the radiation of divine virtue through all souls, destroying their individuality, that all may be absorbed into Christ. Individualities emerge out of God, and through Christ are drawn back into God.

The influence of St. Paul's ideas is again noticeable. We are not told that the perfect man who speaks with a voice of thunder, and who is placed in contrast with the mutilated man, is Christ, and that the latter is the Demiurge, but we can scarcely doubt it. It is greatly to be regretted that we have so little of this curious book preserved.<sup>2</sup> The second passage, with its signification, had better repose in a foot-note, and in Greek. It allows us to understand the expression of St. Ephraem, "They shamelessly boast of their Gospel of Eve."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Epiph. Hæres. xxvi. 3.

<sup>2</sup> The second passage and its meaning are: *Εἶδον δένδρον φέρον δώδεκα καρποὺς τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ, καὶ εἶπέ μοι· τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ αὐτοῖ ἀλληγοροῦσιν εἰς τὴν κατὰ μῆνα γινομένην γυναικείαν ῥύσιν. Μισγόμενοι δὲ μετ' ἀλλήλων τεκνοποῦν ἀπαγορεύουσιν. οὐ γὰρ εἰς τὸ τεκνοποιῆσαι παρ' αὐτοῖς ἡ φθορὰ ἐσπούδασται, ἀλλ' ἡδονῆς χάριν.*—Epiph. Hæres. xxvi. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Epiph. Hæres. xxvi. 2. He says, moreover: *οὐκ αἰσχυρόμενοι αὐτοῖς τοῖς ῥήμασι τὰ τῆς πορνείας διηγείσθαι πάλιν ἐρωτικά τῆς κύπριδος ποιητούματα.*