

# PISTIS SOPHIA

G.R.S. MEAD



# **Pistis Sophia**

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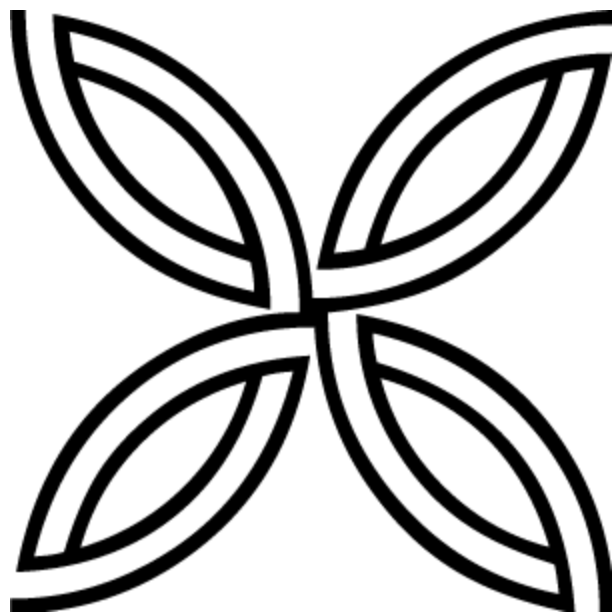
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# **Pistis Sophia**

**Mead, G. R. S**



# PREFACE

IN the Introduction (pp. xxxv f.) to the first edition (1896), the translator wrote:

"In presenting the following translation to the English-reading public, I may say that I should not have ventured on such an undertaking if any Coptic scholar had undertaken the task, or I had heard that such a task was contemplated. In a matter of so great difficulty every possible liability to error should be eliminated, and it stands to reason that the translation of a translation must needs be but an apology for a first-hand version.

Nevertheless I am not without predecessors. The Coptic MS. itself is in the first place a translation, so that even Coptic scholars must give us the version of a translation. I am persuaded also that the anonymous and very imperfect French translation (1856) in the Appendix to Migne's *Dictionnaire des Apocryphes* (vol. i.) is made from Schwartz's Latin version (1851) and not from the Coptic text. C. W. King in *The Gnostics and their Remains* (2nd ed., 1887) has also translated a number of pages of the Pistis Sophia from Schwartz. Some three or four years ago Mr. Nutt, King's publisher, sent out a notice proposing the publication of the whole of King's translation, but the project fell through. Last year (1895) I offered to edit this translation of King's, but was informed that the literary legatee of the deceased scholar was of the opinion that it would be unfair to his memory to publish a MS. that was in so incomplete a condition.

"In 1890 I had already translated Schwartz's Latin version into English and published pages 1 to 252, with comments, notes, etc., in magazine-form from April 1890 to April 1891. But I hesitated to put it forward in book-form, and should

not have done so, but for the appearance of Amélineau's French translation in 1895. I then went over the whole again and checked it by Amélineau's version. I was further induced to venture on this undertaking, because the narrative, though dealing with mystical and therefore obscure subjects, is in itself exceedingly simple, and therefore mistakes cannot so readily creep in as into a difficult philosophical work. I, therefore, present my translation with all hesitation, but at the same time think that the English public, which is steadily increasing its interest in mysticism and allied subjects, will be better satisfied with half a loaf than with no bread."

A quarter of a century has rolled away; much water has flowed under the bridges of scholarly research whence the general stream of Gnosticism has been surveyed with greater accuracy, and much good work been done on the special subject of the Coptic Gnostic documents. Though the first edition of this book was quickly exhausted and many requests were made for a second, I had hitherto refused to accede to this demand, still hoping that some English Coptic scholar would take the matter in hand. Indeed, at one time I was in high expectation that this would be achieved. Shortly before the War a friend, whom I had interested in the work, completed a version of the fine Untitled Apocalypse of the Bruce Codex, and was next to have attempted a translation of the P.S. But pressing interests and activities of a totally different nature connected with the War and its aftermath have absorbed all my friend's energies, and the version of the P.S. has been definitely abandoned. Nor can I hear of any other project of translation. This being the case, and as the utility of even a translation of a translation is evidenced by the keen demand for the volume in the second-hand market, I have at last decided to repeat my venture.

Nevertheless a reprint of the first edition was not to be thought of. Introduction and translation needed revision in

the light of twenty-five years' further study of the work of specialists. To this end the most valuable help, not to speak of his long labours on the allied documents, is afforded by Carl Schmidt's admirable German translation of the P.S. (1905).

Schwartz's Latin translation was good for its date (1851), and scholars still quote it to-day; Amélineau's French rendering (1895) was somewhat of an improvement; but Schmidt's version is unquestionably the best. I have therefore revised my prior Englishing from the former two by the finer work of the latter. Schmidt is exceedingly careful throughout, and not only have I taken his decision where Schwartz and Amélineau differ, but have generally preferred him for consistency in phrasing. In my humble opinion it will be long before we have a better rendering than that of this ripe Coptic scholar.

But not only has the Translation been thoroughly revised; the Introduction has been entirely rewritten and the Annotated Bibliography corrected and brought up to date. The second edition is practically a new book.

The Schwartz-Petermann marginal pagination, which is the usual scheme of reference, and which in the first edition was shown in brackets in the text, is now indicated at the side of the page. I have also adopted Schmidt's division into chapters as an additional convenience for more general reference, and have numbered the verses of the Psalms and of the Odes of Solomon for easier comparison with the Repentances and Songs of Sophia. It should, of course, be understood that the detailed paragraphing does not exist in the original, which runs on for the most part monotonously without break.

G. R. S. M.

# INTRODUCTION

## **The Askew Codex**

THE unique MS. of the Coptic Gnostic document commonly called 'Pistis Sophia' was bought by the British Museum in 1785 from the heirs of Dr. Askew, and is now catalogued as MS. Add. 5114. The title on the back of the modern binding is ' *Piste Sophia Coptice.*' On top of the first page of the MS. is the signature 'A. Askew, M.D.' On the first page of the binding is the following note, probably in the hand of Woide, the most famous Coptic scholar of those days and Librarian of the Museum:

" *Codex dialecti Superioris Ægypti, quam Sahidicam seu Thebaidicam votant, cujus titulus exstat pagina 115: Pmeh snaou ñtomos ñtpiste Sophia--Tomos secundus fidelis Sapientiæ--deest pagina 337-344.*"

The title 'Piste Sophia' is incorrect. Nowhere is this form found in the very numerous instances of the name in the text, and the hastily suggested 'emendation' of Dulaurier and Renan to read 'Piste Sophia' throughout has perforce received no support.

Woide, in a letter to Michaelis (Bibliography, 4), says that Askew bought the MS. from a book-seller (apparently in London); its previous history is unknown. Crum informs us in an official description (Bib. 46, p. 173) that at the end of a copy in the B.M. of the sale-catalogue of Askew's MSS. is the entry: 'Coptic MS. £10. 10. 0.,' and that this refers presumably to our Codex--a good bargain indeed!

The best descriptions of the MS. are by Schmidt (Introd. to his Trans., Bib. 45, pp. xi f.), and Crum ( *l.c.*). The Codex is of parchment and contains 178 leaves = 356 pages 4to (8¾ x 6½ in.). The writing is in two columns of from 30 to 34 lines each. There are 23 quires in all; but the first has only

12 and the last 8 pages, of which the last page is left blank. It is, as a whole, in an exceptionally well-preserved state, only 8 leaves being missing (see ch. 143, end).

### **The Scripts**

The writing as a whole is the work of two scribes, whose entirely different hands are very clearly distinguishable. The first (MS. pp. 1-22, 196-354) wrote a fine, careful, old uncial, and the second (MS. pp. 23-195) in comparison a careless, clumsy hand with signs of shakiness which S. thinks might suggest the writing of an old man. They used different inks and different methods both of paging and correction, not to speak of other peculiarities. These scribes must have been contemporaries and divided the task of copying fairly equally between them. So far Crum and Schmidt are in complete agreement; they differ only as to the handwriting of a note on MS. p. 114, col. 2, of the superscription on p. 115 and of the last page (see pp. 105, 106 and 325 of Trans.).

### **The Contents**

From an external point of view the contents fall into 4 main Divisions, generally referred to as Books i.-iv.

i. The first extends to the end of ch. 62, where in the MS. more than a column and a half has been left blank, and a short, but entirely irrelevant, extract has been copied on to the second column, presumably from some other book of the general allied literature.

There is no title, either superscription or subscription, to this Div. Why the second scribe left a blank here in his copying is a puzzle, for the text which follows on MS. p. 115 runs straight on without a break of subject or incident.

ii. The next page is headed 'The Second Book (or Section) of Pistis Sophia.' Crum assigns this superscription to the second hand, and the short extract on the second column of the preceding page to the first. But Schmidt thinks that both are later additions by another hand, and this is borne



out both by the colour of the ink and also by the very important fact that the older Coptic MSS. have the title at the end and not at the beginning of a volume, conserving the habit of the ancient roll-form. And as a matter of fact we find at the bottom of MS. p. 233, col. 1, the subscription: 'A Portion of the Books (or Texts) of the Saviour' (see end of ch. 100).

iii. There follows a short piece on the Gnosis of the Ineffable (ch. 101), which is without any setting and entirely breaks the order of sequence of ideas and is the end of a larger whole. It is clearly an extract from another 'Book.'

After this again with ch. 102 we have a very distinct change of subject, though not of setting, from the ending of ii., so that, in my opinion, it is difficult to regard it as an immediate continuation. Later, at ch. 126, occurs another abrupt change of subject, though not of setting, preceded by a lacuna in the text. At the end of ch. 135 (bottom of MS. p. 318, col. 1) we have again the subscription: 'A Portion of the Books of the Saviour.'

iv. The last piece has no title, either superscription or subscription. From the change of setting in its introduction and the nature of its contents it is generally assigned to an earlier phase of the literature. Here again a complete change of subject occurs with ch. 144, after a lacuna of 8 leaves. Finally, on the last page is an appendix, somewhat in the style of the Mark-conclusion, beginning quite abruptly in the middle of a sentence and presumably part of a larger whole. The contents, measurements and writing make it almost certain that it formed no part of the original copy. At the very end two lines surrounded by ornamentation are erased. These may have contained the names of the owner or scribes, or possibly a general subscript title.

## **The Title**

From the above indications and from a detailed study of the contents it is evident that, though the episode of the adventures of Pistis Sophia, her repentances and songs and their solutions (chh. 30-64), occupy much space, it is by no means the principal theme of the collection; it is rather an incident. The blundering heading of a later scribe, 'The Second Book of Pistis Sophia,' some two-thirds of the way through this episode, has misled earlier scholars and set up the bad habit of referring to the whole document as the 'Pistis Sophia'--a habit it is now too late to change. If there is any general title to be derived from the MS. itself, it should be rather 'A Portion' or 'Portions of the Books of the Saviour.' Whether this title can be made to cover Div. iv. is an open question. In any case we have before us extracts from a more extensive literature which belonged to the same group, and of which there were at least two strata. The contents of the Askew Codex are thus a collection or a miscellany, and not a single consistent work. It is very difficult, therefore, to distinguish the contents by any consistent nomenclature. I have followed the usual custom of calling the whole 'Pistis Sophia,' and let Divv. i. and ii. stand as Books i. and ii., as is usually done, though this is clearly improper, judged from the point of view of contents. Thereafter I have distinguished the extracts in Div. iii. as being from two different 'Books' (apart from the short insertion at the beginning), and again those in Div. iv. as being from two different 'Books,' these 'Books' meaning simply subdivisions of or excerpts from larger wholes. It seems highly probable that our scribes did not do the extracting themselves, but found it already done in the copy which lay before them.

## **The Date of the MS**

The date of our MS. is undecided, owing to the difficulty of making exact judgments in Coptic paleography. The general view assigns it with Schmidt to the 5th century. It

may be noted that Woide (Bib. 3) assigned it to the 4th, and Crum seems to agree with him. Hyvernat (Bib. 21) suggests the 6th, and Wright (Bib. 16) the 7th. Amélineau (Bib. 35) goes to a ridiculous extreme by placing it in the 9th or 10th century, but his too radical views have been severely criticized.

### **Translated from the Greek**

The Coptic of the P.S. is in pure Sahidic--that is, the dialect of Upper Egypt,--preserving many features of antiquity. It is, however, clearly not the original language in which the extracts were written. These, like the rest of the extant Coptic Gnostic documents, were originally composed in Greek. This is shown by the very large number of Greek words, not only names, but substantives, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and even conjunctions, left untranslated, on well-nigh every page, and this applies to the O.T. and N.T. quotations equally with the rest. The Schwartz-Petermann Latin version preserves every Greek word throughout untranslated, and Schmidt's German translation invariably adds them in brackets. In the P.S. a large number of abstract qualificative general names of exalted super-æonic orders is given, such as 'Unapproachables,' 'Uncontainables,' which could not possibly be native to Coptic diction. In a number of passages again, where the translator had difficulty, he slavishly follows the Greek construction. Frequently also he gives alternative renderings. The fact of translation from the Greek is well-nigh universally acknowledged; and indeed we now possess decisive objective proof, for one of the documents in the Berlin Codex, which presents identical linguistic phenomena, lay before Irenæus in its Greek original form (Bib. 47). Nevertheless Granger (Bib. 44) and Scott-Moncrieff (Bib. 56) have questioned this fact of translation, and quite recently Rendel Harris (Bib. 60), after accepting the general consensus of opinion (Bib. 49), has changed his mind and thinks that the matter should be reinvestigated.

None of these scholars, however, has set forth any objective grounds for his opinion. It is difficult to believe that any one who has laboured through the versions line by line and word by word can have the slightest doubt on the matter. The whole style of the work is foreign to the Coptic idiom, as may be seen from Amélineau's Introduction to his French version (Bib. 35), where he writes (p. x): "Whoever has any knowledge of the Coptic language knows that this idiom is foreign to long sentences; that it is a tongue eminently analytic and by no means synthetic; that its sentences are composed of small clauses exceedingly precise, and almost independent of each other. Of course all Coptic authors are not equally easy, some of them are even exceedingly difficult to understand; but this much is certain, that never under any circumstances in Coptic do we come across those periods with complicated incidental sentences, of three or four different clauses, whose elements are synthetically united together so that the sense of the entire sentence cannot be grasped before we arrive at the last clause. Nevertheless, this is just what the reader meets with in this work. The sentences are so entangled with incidental and complicated propositions, that often, indeed very often, the Coptic translator has lost the thread, so to say, and made main propositions out of incidental clauses. . . . The one thing that it conclusively proves is that the book was originally written in a learned language." Amélineau makes rather too much of the abstruse nature of the subject; for, though many passages are transcendental or mystical, nevertheless the whole is conceived in a narrative or descriptive style. There is no attempt at philosophical argument, no really involved logical propositions. We may then take it as sufficiently established that Greek originals underlay the whole contents of the Askew Codex. It is on this basis at any rate that rests every methodical attempt which has hitherto been made to determine the most probable place and date of origin and

to discover the school or circle to which the P.S. miscellany can be referred.

### **Originals composed in Egypt**

Amid much else that is uncertain no one has questioned that the immediate place of origin must be sought in an Egyptian environment. In other words, the 'Books' of the miscellany were all composed or compiled in Egypt, though where precisely it is impossible to conjecture. But the clearly Egyptian elements are not the more numerous; moreover, they do not seem to be the most fundamental, but are blended with, or rather superimposed upon, others which clearly did not originate in Egypt.

The date of composition is a difficult problem, and is bound up with the more puzzling question of the sect to which the P.S. literature should be ascribed. There is as yet no certainty; it is a matter of cumulative probabilities at best.

### **Date: The 2nd-century Theory**

The earlier view ascribed the P.S. to Valentinus, who died probably about the middle of the, or a decade later, or alternatively to an adherent of the Valentinian school. We may call it the 2nd-century theory. A succession of scholars were of this opinion, among whom may be mentioned Woide, Jablonski, La Croze, Dulaurier, Schwartz, Renan, Révillout, Usener and Amélineau. This earlier view can hardly be said to have been supported by any great show of detailed argument, except by the French Egyptologist and Coptic scholar Amélineau, who was its most stalwart supporter. Seven years prior to his translation of P.S. in 1895, Amélineau devoted 156 pp. of a voluminous essay (Bib. 19), in which he sought to prove the Egyptian origins of Gnosticism--a general thesis which can hardly be maintained in the light of more recent research,--to a comparison of the system of Valentinus with that of the P.S.

### **The 3rd-century Theory**

Meantime in Germany, shortly after the appearance of Schwartz's Latin version in 1851, the careful analysis of

the system of the P.S. by Köstlin in 1854 gave rise to or confirmed another view. It abandoned the Valentinian origin, and pronounced generally in favour of what may be called an 'Ophitic' derivation. Köstlin placed the date of the P.S. in the 1st half of the 3rd century, and Lipsius (Bib. 15) and Jacobi (Bib. 17) accepted his finding. We may call this alternative general view the 3rd-century theory.

In 1891 Harnack, accepting Köstlin's analysis of the system, attacked the problem from another point of view, basing himself chiefly on the use of scripture, as shown in the quotations from the O.T. and N.T., and on the place of the doctrinal ideas and stage of the sacramental practices in the general history of the development of Christian dogma and rites. He pointed out also one or two other vague indications, such as a reference to persecution, from which he concluded that it was written at a date when the Christians were 'lawfully' persecuted. These considerations led him to assign the most probable date of composition to the 2nd half of the 3rd century. Schmidt in 1892 accepted this judgment, with the modification, however, that Div. iv. belonged to an older stratum of the literature, and should therefore be placed in the 1st half of the century. This general view has been widely adopted as the more probable. In Germany it has been accepted by such well-known specialists as Bousset, Preuschen and Liechtenhan; and in France by De Faye. Among English scholars may be mentioned chiefly E. F. Scott, Scott-Moncrieff and Moffat. The only recent attempt to return to the earlier 2nd-century view is that of Legge in 1915 (Bib. 57), who roundly plumps for Valentinus as the author. In order to do this he thinks it necessary first of all to get out of the way Harnack's parallels in P.S. with the fourth gospel. They may just as well, he contends, be compilations from the synoptics. One clear parallel only can be adduced, and this may be due to a common source. I am not convinced by this criticism; nor do I think it germane to Legge's general

contention, for it is precisely in Valentinian circles that the fourth gospel first emerges in history. In the Introduction to the first edition of the present work I registered my adherence to the Valentinian hypothesis, but, as I now think, somewhat too precipitously. On general grounds the 3rd-century theory seems to me now the more probable; but, even if Harnack's arguments as a whole hold, I see no decisive reason why the P.S. may not equally well fall within the 1st half as within the 2nd half of the century.

### **The 'Ophitic' Background**

The question of the sect or even grouping to the P.S. literature should be assigned is still more difficult. To call it 'Ophitic' is nebulous at best. Ophitism in Gnosticism is ill-defined, if not chaotic, owing to the confusing indications of the Church Fathers. They called Ophitic or classed as Ophitic very different sects who never used the name for themselves. It ought to mean people either who worshipped the serpent or in whose symbolism or mythology the serpent played the most characteristic or dominant *rôle*. But most of what we are told of the views and doctrines of circles directly referred to under this opprobrious designation (as it is clearly intended to be by the heresiologists) and of those brought into close connection with them, has not the slightest reference to what by hypothesis should have been their chief cult-symbol. *Sed et serpens* is conspicuous by its absence. All that we can legitimately say is that along this confused line of heredity we have to push back our researches in any endeavour to discover the earliest developments of Gnosticism in Christian circles. These took place unquestionably first on Syrian ground, and doubtless had already a long heredity behind them, former phases of syncretism, blendings of Babylonian, Persian, Semitic and other elements. The 'Ophitic' elements in P.S. are of Syrian origin, but developed on Egyptian soil. If there is also a slight Hellenistic tinging, it is not of a philosophizing nature.

### **Three vague Pointers**

Can we, however, find any indications in the P.S. which might be thought to direct us whither to search in the jumble of sects which the chief heresiological Fathers bring into an 'Ophitic' connection? There are three vague pointers: (1) Philip is declared pre-eminently (chh. 22, 42) to be the scribe of all the deeds and discourses of the Saviour, but with him are associated Thomas and Matthew (ch. 43); (2) in Div. iii. Mary Magdalene stands forth as the chief questioner, no less than 39 of the 42 questions being put in her mouth; (3) in Div. iv. a foul act of obscene sorcery is condemned as the most heinous of all sins (ch. 147).

Now, Epiphanius (writing about 374-377 A.D.) groups together certain sects under the names Nicolaitans, Gnostics, Ophites, Cainites, Sethians and Archontics; these possessed a rich apocalyptic literature. Among the titles of their books reference is made to a *Gospel of Philip* (*Hær.* xxvi. 13) and *Questions of Mary*, both *The Great* and *The Little* (*ib.* 8). A quotation is given from the former, and several from the latter. But in both cases they are of an obscene nature and have clearly nothing whatever to do with P.S. in any way. It is true that the more abundant quotations are from *The Great Questions*, and this has led Harnack and others to assume that *The Little Questions* may have been of a different and even ascetic character. But Epiphanius classes the two writings together without distinction; and even if the title *Questions of Mary* could be legitimately given to part of the contents of P.S., surely these would be more appropriately styled *The Great* and not *The Little Questions*? Finally, the document from which Epiphanius quotes belongs to a different type of setting. Mary questions apart, is alone with Jesus. She is not with the rest of the disciples, as in the P.S.

In describing these sects Epiphanius repeatedly dwells on certain unspeakably foul rites and practices which he would have us believe were widely spread among them. P.S.



condemns with even greater severity a similar obscene abomination, introducing this stern reprobation with the solemn words, the only instance of such an outbreak in the whole narrative: "Jesus was wroth with the world in that hour and said unto The libertine Sects of Epiphanius. Thomas: 'Amēn, I say unto you: This sin is more heinous than all sins and all iniquities.'" There is, however, no indication that in the experience of the writers of the P.S. such a practice was widespread; on the contrary, it would seem for them to have been a rare occurrence--indeed, the most horrible thing of which they had ever heard. If Epiphanius is to be relied on here, it is vain to look for the Gnostics of the P.S. in such an environment. But Epiphanius has no great reputation for accuracy in general, and it is very difficult to believe in such widespread iniquity of so loathsome a nature. In any case he is writing at a later date. Liechtenhan's hypothesis (Bib. 41), that a certain common body of literature was rewritten--on the one hand to serve libertine propensities, and on the other in the interest of ascetic tendencies,--though more or less accepted by Harnack, seems to me to be too facile a generalization to meet the special difficulty with which we are confronted. Epiphanius in his youth had certain unfortunate experiences with the adherents of a libertine sect in Egypt, and the moral shock it gave him seems to have warped his judgment as a historian in this part of his work; it led him to collect every scrap of evidence of obscenity he could lay hands on and every gross scandal that had come to his ears, and freely to generalize therefrom.

### **The Severians**

Into relation with the above-mentioned Epiphanian group of names Schmidt brings the ascetic Severians; these, according to our heresiologist (xlv.), still in his own day

maintained a miserable existence in the upper Thebaid. To them S. would specifically refer the P.S. But, in my opinion, it is very difficult indeed to fit in what Epiphanius tells us so sketchily of these people, however skilfully it is analyzed, with the main doctrines and practices in the P.S.

### **The Bruce Codex**

With nothing but Patristic indications before us, no matter what pains are taken to submit them to microscopic critical inspection, it seems impossible to place the P.S. precisely. But our Codex does not stand in isolation as the only directly known Christian Gnostic document--that is to say, as coming straight from the hands of the Gnostics themselves, though by way of translation. We have first of all the two MSS. of the Bruce Codex in the Bodleian, Oxford. One of these, *The Book of the Great Logos according to the Mystery*, is closely connected with the literature from which the P.S. miscellany is excerpted, especially with Div. iv. We can say with a high degree of confidence that it belonged to the same tradition, though whether to an earlier or later stratum is not quite decided. There are, however, no indications in it which will further help us as to date or name of sect. The second MS., a lofty apocalypse, which unfortunately bears no title, is of another line of tradition or type of interest. Schmidt, in the Introduction to his translation (p. xxvi, Bib. 45), thinks he can refer it with certainty to the Sethian-Archontic group, placing it in the 1st half of the 3rd century, instead of, as previously (Bib. 28), in the last quarter of the 2nd. His reason for this change of view may be seen from the following observations, which introduce us to the third extant, but unpublished, collection of Coptic Gnostic works.

### **The Berlin Codex**

On July 16, 1896, Schmidt surprised and delighted students of Gnosticism by reporting, at a sitting of the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences, on the contents of a precious Coptic Gnostic Codex which had in January of the

same year been procured by Dr Reinhardt at Cairo from a dealer in antiquities from Akhmīm, and is now in the safe custody of the Berlin Egyptian Museum ( *Sitzungsberichte d. k. p. Akad. d. Wissensch. zu Berlin*, xxxvi). This notice and a more detailed study of one of the treatises by S. in 1907 (Bib. 47) give us all the information we possess so far concerning this very important Codex. In 1900 I summarized S.'s first notice in the first edition of my *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten* (pp. 579-592). The Codex consists mainly of three original Greek Gnostic works in Coptic translation: (1) *The Gospel of Mary*; (2) *The Apocryphon of John*; (3) *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ*. At the end there is an extract from *The Acts of Peter*, which are also of Gnostic origin, setting forth an episode from the healing wonders of the Apostle.

*The Gospel of Mary* relates visions of John and Mary Magdalene, but Schmidt gives us none of their contents. He is equally reserved as to the contents of *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ*, giving only the introduction. After the resurrection the twelve disciples and seven women-disciples of Jesus go into Galilee to a certain mountain (as in Div. iv. of P.S.). To them Jesus appears as a great angel of light and bids them lay all their questions before him. The disciples bring forward their questions and receive the desired replies. Schmidt must have told Harnack more about the contents, for in an appendix to the report, the latter ventures on the suggestion that it may possibly be found that this treatise is the lost book of Valentinus referred to under the title of *Wisdom*.

### **The so-called Barbēlō-Gnostics**

It is the second treatise, *The Apocryphon of John*, to which S. devotes most of his attention in both the papers to which we are referring, the titles of which are respectively, 'A Pre-irenæic Gnostic Original Work in Coptic' and 'Irenæus and his Source in *Adv. Hær.* i. 29,' S. proves beyond a shadow of doubt that the Greek original of this Gnostic apocryphon

lay before Irenæus (c. 190 A.D.), and that the Church Father's method of quotation and summarizing is, to say the least of it, misleading, for it practically makes nonsense of what is by no means absurd. The treatise tells us much of interest concerning the part played by Barbēlō, 'the perfect Power,' 'the Æon perfect in glory'; the system is of the philosophized type and by no means inconsistent. Hitherto the clumsy treatment of it by Irenæus has been generally referred to as descriptive of the tenets of the Barbēlō-Gnostics, and to them Scott (Bib. 54) and Moffat (Bib. 58) have sought variously to ascribe the P.S. These Gnostics are brought by Irenæus into a confused relationship with some of the sects of the group on which Epiphanius two centuries later animadverted so severely.

### **The Sethians**

Schmidt, however, has shown that the document in question belongs immediately to the literature of the Sethians, to whom also he now ascribes the Untitled Apocalypse of the Bruce Codex. *The Apocryphon of John* is clearly imbued with a very similar spirit of philosophizing to that of the Valentinian school, and Schmidt promises to compare the two systems in detail, so as to determine their relationship, when he publishes his translation of these new documents, which are of so great importance for the history of the Christianized Gnosis.

### **The present Position of the Enquiry**

What precise light the publication of Schmidt's labours will throw, directly or indirectly, on the puzzling question of the exact placing of the P.S. literature, we must wait to see; it is highly probable, however, that it will throw some light on its problems. But from what we glean so far from the above indications it may be again suggested that, though the Valentinian hypothesis will have to be definitely abandoned, there seems nothing to compel us to lean to the 2nd rather than to the 1st half of the 3rd century for the date. Here the view of Lipsius (Bib. 20) and Bousset (Bib. 48), that

similar features in the P.S. and the religion of Mani are in a more primitive form in the former than in the latter, has to be considered. Manichæism emerged somewhere about 265 A.D., but it is very difficult to say what was its precise original form. The similarities in the two systems may of course be due to their coming from a common source.

### **The new and the old Perspective in Gnostic Studies**

What is certain is that we have in the contents of the Askew, Bruce and Berlin Codices a rich material which hands on to us valuable direct information concerning what I have called 'The Gnosis according to its Friends,' in distinction from what previously used to be our only sources, the polemical writings of the heresiological Fathers, which set forth 'The Gnosis according to its Foes.' We have thus at last a new standpoint from which to review the subject, and therewith the opportunity of revising our impressions in a number of respects; a considerably different angle of vision must needs change the perspective of no little in the picture.

The chief business or interest of the orthodox Fathers was to select and stress what appeared to them to be the most bizarre points and elements, all that was most absurd in their judgment, in the many Gnostic systems, and of course, and rightly, everything that could be thought to be ethically reprehensible. Good, bad and indifferent were only too frequently lumped together. It was of no interest to this polemic to mention similarities in belief and practice between the heretics and their opponents, to dwell on the lofty faith of numbers of these Gnostics in the transcendent excellence and overmastering glory of the Saviour, or on many signs of spiritual inwardness, and especially of high virtue, in which they were at the least not less scrupulous than their critics. Doubtless there were sects and groups whose tenets were absurd at any valuation, and some whose laxity of ethics demanded severe reprobation. But the majority could not be accused on the score of moral

delinquency, indeed no few were rigidly ascetic; and some of their speculations again have a sublimity of their own, and in a number of cases anticipated Catholic dogma. If we turn to our direct sources in Coptic translation, we find that the ethic is admirable, even if we are averse from over-asceticism in the religious life, and that their whole-souled devotion to and worship of the Saviour is unbounded. It is no part of the plan of this translation to attempt anything in the nature of a commentary. That would mean a second volume, and would in any case be an unsatisfactory performance; for much would still remain obscure, even if every ray of light shed on this or that special point by those who have most deeply studied the subject, were gathered together. One or two very general remarks, however, may be ventured.

### **The Ministry of the First Mystery**

In the P.S. Jesus is everywhere pre-eminent and central. He is here revealed as Saviour and First Mystery, who knows all and unveils all, infinite in compassion. As such he is pre-existent from eternity, and his ministry is not only earthly, but cosmic and supercosmic; indeed, it is the chief feature in the divine economy. Yet nowhere is he called the Christ. If this is intentional, no reason seems to be assignable for such an abstention. There is no sign of antagonism to Judaism or to the O.T. On the contrary, the psalms and other utterances which are quoted, are validated by the theory that it was the Power of the Saviour which so prophesied of old through the mouth of a David, a Solomon, or an Isaiah.

### **The post-resurrectional Setting**

The whole setting is post-resurrectional. In Divv. i.-iii. Jesus has already, for eleven years after the crucifixion, been instructing his disciples, men and women, in the Gnosis. The scene now depicts the disciples as gathered round the Saviour on the Mount of Olives on earth. The range and

scope of this prior teaching may be seen in Div. iv., where the introductory words speak of it as taking place simply after the crucifixion. In this stratum the scene is different. The sacramental rite is solemnized on earth; it takes place, however, on the Mount of Galilee and not on the Mount of Olives. But the scene is not confined to earth only, for the disciples are also taken into some of the regions of the invisible world, above and below, have vision there conferred upon them, and are instructed on its meaning. Now in Divv. i.-iii. Jesus promises to take the disciples into the spheres and heavens for the direct showing of their nature and quality and inhabitants, but there is no fulfilment of this promise in the excerpts we have from 'The Books of the Saviour.' It is not to be supposed, however, that Div. iv. is part of the fulfilment of the high promise made in the prior extracts; for in it we move in an earlier phase of the instruction and in an atmosphere of lesser mysteries than those indicated in the preceding part.

### **The higher Revelation within this Setting**

Divv. i.-iii. throughout proclaim the revelation of higher mysteries. This is only now made possible by the supremely joyous fact that in the twelfth year of the inner-teaching-ministry a great, if not supreme, moment in the life of the Saviour has been accomplished: his earthly ministry is now achieved, and he is invested with the full radiance of his triple robe of glory, which embraces the whole powers of the universe. He ascends into heaven in dazzling light which blinds the disciples. After thirty hours he returns again, and in compassion withdraws his blinding splendour, so as to give his final teaching to his faithful in his familiar form. This means that 'The Books of the Saviour' purport to contain not only a post-resurrectional teaching, and therefore a Gnostic revelation supplementary to the public preaching before the crucifixion, but also a still higher and more intimate unveiling within the post-resurrectional instruction already current in the tradition. If there had

been apocalyptic elements and visions in the prior literature, there were to be still more transcendental revelations now on the completion of the ministry. Until the investiture, or rather reinvestiture, had taken place according to the divine command, it had not been possible for the Saviour to speak in utter openness face to face on all things; now it is possible. Such is the convention.

### **The Æon-lore**

In Divv. i.-iii. there is presupposed throughout a system of æons and the rest, which is already highly complex and shows manifest signs of consisting of stages once severally at the summit of earlier systems, but now successively subordinated. It is clear then that, if still loftier hierarchies are to be brought on to the stage, it can only be by again reducing what had previously been regarded as 'the end of all ends' to a subordinate position. This is the method adopted, and we lose ourselves in the recital of the designations and attributes of ever more transcendental beings and spaces and mysteries.

### **The Sophia Episode**

In all of this, however, there is no sign of interest in metaphysical speculation; there is no philosophizing. It is then not any element of Hellenic thought proper in the æonology, which is said to have been so strongly the case with the teaching of Valentinus himself, that has led so many to conjecture a Valentinian derivation. It is rather the long episode of the sorrowing Sophia which has influenced them. This episode reflects on a lower level of the cosmic scale somewhat of the *motif* of the 'tragic myth' of the world-soul, the invention of which is generally ascribed to Valentinus himself, though he may possibly have transformed or worked up already existing materials or notions. It is this long Sophia episode and its skilfully inverted mystical exegesis and allegorical interpretation, following the methods developed by Alexandrine contemplatives, which has produced the impression on



many that it was of fundamental importance for the system of the P.S.

### **The ethical Interest**

It is certainly an indication of the deep interest of the circle in repentance and the penitential psalms. But the interest is here ethical rather than cosmological. Pistis Sophia would seem to be intended to represent the type of the faithful repentant individual soul. Throughout, the chief interest is in salvation and redemption. This is to be acquired by repentance and by renunciation of the world, its lures and cares, but above all by faith in the Saviour, the Divine Light, and his mysteries. The first requisite is sincere repentance. The chief topic round which all the ethical teaching naturally centres, is sin, its cause and its purification, and the revelation of the mystery of the forgiveness of sins and of the infinite compassion of the First Mystery. Though there is very much also concerning the complex schematology of the invisible worlds and the hierarchies of being, much concerning the soul and its origin, of how it comes to birth and departs from earth-life, much of the light-power, the spiritual element in man,--all is subordinated to the ethical interest in the first place, and in the second to the efficacy of the high mysteries of salvation.

### **The Mysteries**

The whole is set forth in terms of these mysteries, which are now conceived in a far more vital way than was apparently the case in the earlier literature. On the lower side the mysteries still in some respects keep in touch with the tradition of words-of-power, authentic and incorruptible names, and so forth, though there is little of this specifically in Divv. i.-iii. But it is evidently intended that the higher mysteries should now be conceived in the light of the fact that the Saviour himself is in himself concretely the First Mystery and indeed the Last Mystery, and that the mysteries are not so much spiritual powers as substantive

beings of transcendent excellence. The light-robe is a mystery of mysteries, and they who have received of the high mysteries become light-streams in passing from the body. The mysteries are closely intertwined with the lore of the glory and its modes.

### **The astral Lore**

One of the main elements in the lower schematology is the ancient astral lore, those ground-conceptions of sidereal religion which dominated the thought of the times and upheld their sway directly and indirectly for long centuries after. But here again our Gnostics, while retaining the schematology for certain purposes, placed it low in the scale. Moreover, while not denying that previously there was truth even in the astrological art, they reduced the chances of the horoscope-casters to zero, by declaring that the Saviour in the accomplishment of his cosmic ministry had now drastically changed the revolution of the spheres, so that henceforth no calculations could be counted on; these were now of no more value than the spinning of a coin.

### **Transcorporation**

Our Gnostics were also transmigratationists; transcorporation formed an integral part of their system. They found no difficulty in fitting it into their plan of salvation, which shows no sign of the expectation of an immediate end of all things--that prime article of faith of the earliest days. So far from thinking that reincarnation is alien to gospel-teaching, they elaborately interpret certain of the most striking sayings in this sense, and give graphic details of how Jesus, as the First Mystery, brought to rebirth the souls of John the Baptizer and of the disciples, and supervised the economy of his own incarnation. In this respect the P.S. offers richer material for those interested in this ancient and widespread doctrine than can be found in any other old-world document in the West.

### **The magical Element**

A far more distressingly puzzling immixture is the element of magic. In Div. iv. especially there are invocations and many names which resemble those found in the Greek magical papyri and other scattered sources. But no one has so far thrown any clear light on this most difficult subject of research in general, much less on its relation to the P.S. It is evident that the writers of Div. iv. and of the first treatise of the Bruce Codex set a high value on such formulæ and on authentic names; nor are these entirely absent from the excerpts from 'The Books of the Saviour,' as witness the five words written on the light-robe. Our Gnostics unquestionably believed in a high magic, and were not averse from finding in what was presumably its most reputable tradition, material which they considered to be germane to their purpose. In this tradition there must have been a supreme personage possessing characteristics that could be brought into close connection with their ideal of the Saviour, for they equate a certain Aberamenthō with him. The name occurs once or twice elsewhere; but who or what it suggested, we do not know. In any case, as they utilized and attempted to sublimate so much else which was considered by many in those days to be most venerable, in order that they might the more extend and exalt the glory of the Saviour and take up into it what they considered the best of everything, so did they with what was presumably the highest they could find in the hoary tradition of magical power, which had enjoyed empery for so long in the antique world and still continued to maintain itself even in religio-philosophical circles, where we should, from the modern standpoint, least expect to find it.

### **History and psychic story**

As to the setting of the narrative,--if we had not such an abundance of instances of pseudo-historic and pseudo-epigraphic scripture-writing, if this were not, so to speak, the commonplace, not only of apocryphal and apocalyptic literature, but also of no little that falls within the borders

of canonical sanction, we might be more surprised than we are at the form in which the composers or compilers have framed their work. It is clear that they loved and worshipped Jesus with an ecstasy of devotion and exaltation; they do not fall short in this of the greatest of his lovers. What sort of authority, then, could they have supposed they had for conceiving the setting of their narrative in the way they have?

Objective physical history, in the rigid sense in which we understand it to-day, was of secondary interest to them, to say the least; indeed, it was apparently of little moment to the Gnostics of any school, and their opponents were not infrequently rowing in the same boat. The Gnostics were, however, less disingenuous; they strenuously declared their belief in continued revelation, they delighted in apocalyptic and in psychic story. The belief in a post-resurrectional teaching had doubtless existed for long in many forms in Gnostic circles. It must have been widespread; for, as shown by Schmidt quite recently (Bib. 59), a Catholic writer in Asia Minor found himself compelled to steal the fire of the Gnostics and adopt the same convention in an orthodox document that was intended to be a polemic against Gnostic ideas, somewhere in the 3rd quarter of the 2nd century. However they arrived at their conviction, it seems highly probable that the writers of the P.S. must have sincerely believed they had high authority for their proceeding, and were in some way emboldened by 'inspiration' to carry out their task. As far as they were concerned, they do not by any means seem conscious of belonging to a decadent movement or of deterioration in the quality of the ideas they were attempting to set forth, as so many modern critics would have it. On the contrary, they thought they were depositories or recipients of profound mysteries never hitherto revealed, and that by a knowledge of these mysteries they could the more efficiently evangelize the world.

## **The P.S. a reserved Document**

It is evident, however, that the P.S. was never intended to be circulated as a public gospel. Certain things are to be preached or proclaimed to the world, but only certain things. Certain mysteries, again, the recipients were to bestow under certain conditions, but others were to be reserved. The 'Books of the Saviour' are, therefore, to be regarded as apocrypha in the original sense of the word--that is, 'withdrawn' or 'reserved' writings. As such they fell within the proscriptions of artificial secrecy common to all the initiatory institutions of the time and of all time. And artificial secrecy can with difficulty, if ever, avoid the moral and intellectual hazard of its innate obscurations. The P.S. was intended for already initiated disciples, for chosen learners, though no pledge of secrecy is mentioned. It was intended, above all, for would-be apostles, for those who should go forth to proclaim what was for them the best of good news; it is clearly the inner instruction of a zealously propagandist sect.

## **Its general Value**

If 'The Books of the Saviour' in their full original form--for in the extant P.S. we have but selections from them and the formulæ of the higher mysteries are omitted,--and if what is given of the lower mysteries in Div. iv. were held back from public perusal owing partly at least to the fear of the unworthy making improper use of them, there is little danger to-day on this score, for this part of the miscellany remains so far the most securely incomprehensible. And indeed no little else remains obscure, even when we are of those who have made a protracted study of the psychical elements in mysticism and of the general psychology of religious experience. But there is much also in our Codex which has a charm of its own. There are things of rare, if exotic, beauty, things of profound ethical significance, things of delicate spiritual texture.

In any case, however all these very various elements and

features in the syncretism be judged and evaluated, the Pistis Sophia is unquestionably a document of the first importance, not only for the history of Christianized Gnosticism, but also for the history of the development of religion in the West.

### **A Skeleton of the Scheme of the System**

In conclusion, a skeleton of the scheme under-lying the P.S. is added. It may prove of service generally to assist the reader in the maze of details.

The Ineffable.

The Limbs of the Ineffable.

I. The Highest Light-world or Realm of Light.

i. The First Space of the Ineffable.

ii. The Second Space of the Ineffable, or The First Space of the First Mystery.

iii. The Third Space of the Ineffable, or The Second Space of the First Mystery.

II. The Higher (or Middle) Light-world.

i. The Treasury of the Light.

1. The Emanations of the Light.

2. The Orders of the Orders.

ii. The Region of the Right.

iii. The Region of the Midst.

III. The Lower Light or Æon-world, or The Mixture of Light and Matter.

i. The Region of the Left.

1. The Thirteenth Æon.

2. The Twelve Eons. p. li

3. The Fate.

4. The Sphere.

5. The Rulers of the Ways of the (Lower) Midst. 1

6. The Firmament.

ii. The World (Kosmos), especially Mankind.

iii. The Under-world.

1. The Amente.

2. The Chaos.