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ARTICLE III.

IDEAS OF THE FUTURE LIFE IN THE PENTATEUCH.

BY THE REV. THOMAS STOUGHTON POTWIN.

DR. L. H. MILLS, the learned Orientalist of Oxford, has thrown the great weight of his authority in support of the view that the early religion of Israel was "Sadducaic," and indeed hardly allows that the Hebrews before the exile had any real belief in immortality.¹ In Sanscrit studies Dr. Mills stands for a high antiquity of the literature and profound views in the authors; but when he turns his face toward the Hebrew, he seems to lose his happy power of insight and worthy appreciation.

It is not strange, perhaps, that the average reader of the English Bible, when he meets the words that the patriarchs "were gathered unto their people" (Gen. xlix. 29, 33), gets little, if any, idea beyond that they died as their fathers had died before them. Our modern notions of the future state are so inextricably interwoven with conceptions of reward and punishment, that any language which does not make account of these seems to be almost meaningless and unimportant. Men immersed in the life of to-day are insensibly drawn to interpret all literature by current ideas. But ignorance and confusion are quite sure to result. The whole matter of making Old Testament criticism seem rational and intelligible to men and women who are not scholars strikes upon this obstacle. But learned commentators and students of the world's primitive literatures ought to be able to free themselves from such

¹ Nineteenth Century, January, 1894.

limitations, and present us broad and liberal views. I hardly need say, however, that such has not always been the case.

It is conceded, of course, that the moral and religious discipline of the Hebrews was not based directly on sanctions drawn from the life after death. That was conducted theoretically in the present life under promises of present blessings or punitive judgments. This no doubt tended somewhat to limit speculation and minimize controversy regarding the future. But we shall make a great mistake if we infer from this the absence of opinions and expectations for the coming state. This is the first point to fix, the separation, in our search for beliefs in regard to future immortality, of all connection with direct promises and threatenings. What then are our sources of information as to these beliefs?

First, we have the direct sources, in what is said in the Pentateuch of the relations of God to man, what is said of the close of the lives of individuals, and what is said of Sheol as a place of the dead. Then we get indirect but most important evidence by a comparative study of the ideas of other peoples contemporary with, or antecedent to, the Hebrews.

Interpreters of the Old Testament have not denied generally that the Pentateuch contains intimations of the immortality of man, but their conclusions have almost without exception been vitiated by their understanding of Sheol. They put everything under its shadow, and a dreadful shadow it is. Thus Lange says (Gen. xv. 15): "They must then still live upon the other side of death, in another state and life; the continued existence after death is here evident, and, indeed, as the word *in peace* intimates, a blessed existence for the pious"; but (under Gen. xxv. 8) he adds: The expression (gathered to his people) "designates especially the being gathered into *Sheol*." In fairness we must also say that he believes that it "also points without doubt, to a communion in a deeper sense with the pious fathers on the other side of death." Lange seems to have made an advance upon the

ideas of Delitzsch, Knobel, and Oehler. Oehler says of Sheol: "Man exists only as a weak shadow which wanders into the kingdom of the dead." "This kingdom is supposed to be in the depths of the earth . . . deeper even than the waters and their inhabitants"—"a region of the thickest darkness, where the light is as midnight"—"where every experience of communion with God is wanting to those resting there."¹"The condition in the realm of death is supposed to be the privation of all that belongs to life in the full sense, and so the realm of death is also called simply destruction." He bases his view on such Scripture as Job x. 22; Ps. lxxxviii. 3-6; Job xxvi. 6; Prov. xv. 11. But to explain the state of the dead in this way is a plain case of building dogma out of elegiac poetry.

THE INDIRECT EVIDENCE.

Let us now look, first, at the indirect evidence of ancient Hebrew opinion as derived from a comparison of the opinions of surrounding peoples.

The earliest literature of the East reveals the conception of a *blessed life in the spirit world with ancestors* as common to Oriental nations. The Vedas show this for the early inhabitants of India. We quote from selections given in the fifth volume of Muir's "Ancient Sanscrit Texts": "By thy guidance, O Soma, our sage ancestors have obtained riches among the gods" (page 284). "The liberal man abides placed upon the summit of the sky; he goes to the gods" (page 285). "May I with my offspring attain immortality" (page 285). "They were the gods, those ancient righteous sages" (page 286). "I have heard of two paths for mortals, that of the fathers and that of the gods" (page 287). "Yama was the first who found for us the way. This home is not to be taken from us. Those who are now born follow by their own paths to the place whither our ancient fathers have departed" (page 292). "Meet with the fathers, meet with Yama. Throwing

¹ Theology of the Old Testament, Vol. i. p. 246f.

off all imperfection again go to thy home. Become united to a body and clothed in a shining form"; "The fathers have made for him this place. . . . Approach the benevolent fathers who dwell in festivity with Yama. . . . May he grant us to live a long life among the gods" (page 293).¹

There was also a Vedic doctrine of the worship of ancestors.

Muir sums up thus the ideas of the Vedic age regarding the future life: "Yama the first of mortals, who died and discovered the way to the other world, guides other men thither and assembles them in a home which is secured to them for ever."

We find the same idea in the Zoroastrian system. Whatever dispute there may be about the date of the Avesta in its present form, there is no dispute as to the antiquity of the generic conceptions which lie at the base of it. And Darmesteter says: "Yama is replaced in the Avesta by Yima who gathers the good together in 'Var' or paradise" (page 75). Again, "The man of Asha (or righteousness) who has lived for Ahura Mazda will have a seat near him in heaven, the same way as in India the man of Rita (the faithful) goes to the palace of Varuna, there to live with the forefathers a life of everlasting happiness" (page 74).

In China the belief that ancestors were gathered in conscious life in the world beyond the grave is very ancient. Dr. Legge, in his "Religions of China," refers this idea to the period preceding the twenty-third century before Christ. Of this early period, he says: "Methods of worship had been instituted; a worship of God for all, but in which the ruler of the state should be the only officiator, and a worship of ancestors by all, or at least by the heads of families, for them-

¹ In respect to the doctrine of the resurrection in this citation, see Muir's summary after page 300; also Roth in *Journal of American Oriental Society*, Vol. iii. p. 343; compare also Professor Jackson in *Biblical World*, June, 1893.

selves and all the members in their relative circle" (page 23).

All know that the Egyptians believed that their dead were gathered together in immortal life, and an eternal home for the fathers could not fail to have been a familiar idea to the Hebrews, who had been put to school in Egypt. But the manifest connection of the early Hebrew literature with the Chaldean makes it of prime importance to learn, if possible, the ideas of the Assyro-Babylonians in this matter. Recent discoveries have opened up the subject somewhat, but the monumental literature, i. e., inscriptions on statues and clay tablets, which has been deciphered is still so fragmentary and incomplete that no one feels that we have reached anything finished and systematic. Our principal sources of information are the stories of the deluge, of Ishtar's descent into Hades, and the penitential psalms. In regard to the first two it must be ever kept in mind that they are simply poetry of the most imaginative kind, and are not to be taken as giving the dicta of calm reason in that age, any more than the poetry of Dante gives the everyday ideas of his time. The penitential psalms are, from a religious point of view, the most remarkable monuments of ancient thought that have come down to us from any people save the Hebrews.

There is one point of negative evidence of agreement between the Babylonians and the Hebrews which is of considerable importance, viz. the absence of any ancestor-worship. Dr. Sayce says: "I can find no trail of ancestor-worship in the early literature of Chaldea which has survived to us." In this the ideas of the Babylonians were more lofty and worthy than those of other Oriental peoples. They worshiped only deities. And so far as they had an influence upon the Hebrew mind it must have been in this sober and rational direction.

Their gloomy ideas of death and the grave we have fully pictured for us in the Ishtar legend. The opening lines, as Dr. Sayce gives them, are:—

“To the land whence none return, the region of (darkness),
 Istar, the daughter of Sin, (inclined) her ear,
 Yea, Istar herself, the daughter of Sin, inclined (her) ear
 To the house of darkness, the seat of the god Irkalla,
 To the house from whose entrance there is no exit;
 To the road from whose passage there is no return;
 To the house from whose visitors the light is excluded,
 The place where dust is their bread and their food is mud.
 The light they behold not, in darkness they dwell,
 . . . Over the door and the bolt the dust is scattered.”¹

It is not difficult to see here the Sheol of the Hebrews, which, as will be shown farther on, is also confined mainly to poetic passages in the Old Testament.

When we inquire for any brighter views of the future, the evidence is meager, but perhaps only because the spade has not yet turned up the tablets which may contain such views, or the decipherer has not reached them in the thousands which are now awaiting translation. There is not, however, an entire lack of evidence that they held such views, and a real doctrine of rewards in immortal life.

Jensen introduces his discussion of the Babylonian “World of the Dead”² with the remark, that the ever-present view of the grave, in which the body is deposited in the earth, has led various peoples to the natural representation of a kingdom of the dead under the earth. But he goes on to show that the poets point out “the islands of the blessed” as an abode of the gods and of such men as are rescued from death. Thus the Noah of Chaldean deluge is translated thither. And, according to Dr. Sayce, Gisdubar (Nimrod) and Heabani enjoy the same fate.

Some of the penitential psalms strongly imply a belief in a future life of joy with the gods as a common aspiration. Thus Dr. Sayce says: “Some at least of the Assyro-Babylonian people asked their deities for something more than merely temporal blessings. . . . They prayed also that they

¹ Hibbert Lectures, p. 221.

² Kosmologie der Babylonier, p. 225.

themselves might live 'for ever' hereafter in 'the land of the silver sky.' The invisible 'heaven of Anu' had vanished into the deep blue of the visible firmament; above and beyond all was the true home of the gods and *the spirits of the blest* [italics ours]; a home toward which the smoke of the altar might ascend, but into whose mysteries none could penetrate till death and the grace of Baal has freed him from the shackles of the flesh."¹

Dr. W. St. Chad Boscawen says of these Babylonian psalms: "These ancient documents serve to bring out more clearly the true theory of Semitic perfectionism, 'a walking with God.' It is this we find in the life of Enoch who walked with God—an expression which may be illustrated by the Assyrian expression for perfect agreement, 'foot and foot' or 'step and step.' It was this trusting, filial relationship which constituted the perfect life rewarded not by death but by 'a going to God,' as in the case of Enoch or the Chaldean Noah, or Elijah whose end was an absorption into the immortal."² "It is the remarkable conception of the 'fatherhood of God' which forms one of the most beautiful features of the sacred literature of Babylonia. In no literature, except that of Israel, do we find so high an ethical conception of the relation of man to his god, or of the true nature of sin, as in this religion of Babylonia. In most religions of the ancient world sin is associated with pain, but to the Babylonian, as to the Hebrew Psalmist, it is a moral alienation from God—in fact, a rupture of the filial relationship."³

In these psalms, Merodach is often described as "the merciful one among the gods who raises the dead to life," or as "the merciful one who loveth to give life to the dead." Dr. Sayce claims that this refers only to life in this world, but the way in which it is distinguished from the healing of

¹ Hibbert Lectures, pp. 365, 366.

² Expository Times, February, 1893, p. 207.

³ *Ibid.*, page 206.

disease, and the sober, matter-of-fact petitions among which the language occurs, would lead one to think that much more must be meant—i. e., nothing short of a future life. In these psalms we find, also, all the associated ideas of the Hebrew religion. Creation, judgment, and mercy are attributed to the deity, and confession of sin with supplication for forgiveness and its removal are put in the mouths of men.

Now, although scholars have not yet found any distinct statements in the tablets so far deciphered of a heaven of the fathers, yet the intimations referred to, and the demands of consistency with the known religious thought, will probably convince most minds that the Babylonians did believe in such a home for mortals beyond the grave, and cause us to expect yet to find clear evidence of it in future readings of their literature.

But the decipherers have found in the monumental literature of still nearer neighbors to the Hebrews evidence of a belief in immortality with the gods. These are the Hittites, whose inscriptions have been discovered at Sindjirli. M. Halévy has given a translation and discussion of these in the *Revue Semitique* for 1893 and 1894.¹ A part of the inscriptions runs thus: "In the future Panammu, my son. . . will mention the name of Hadad (god) . . . will say: 'Let the soul of Panammu drink with thee' and the soul of Pamammu will drink with thee. And at once he will again mention the soul of Panammu with Hadad and Rekubel (gods) . . . in this sacrifice and make him acceptable thereby to Hadad, Rekubel, El, Shemesh."

M. Halévy strongly maintains that there is here a confirmation of his previous opinion of a belief in the immortality of the soul among the Semites. More than twenty years ago he had a controversy on this point with Messrs. Renan and Derenbourg, who contended that the belief in the immortality of the soul was of Platonic origin, and was incompatible with

¹ See American Journal of Archæology, Vol. ix. No. 3.

the unadulterated Semitic genius, and could not have existed among the Semites until the time of Alexander. Halévy's conclusions, as to the belief when and where these inscriptions were made are: (1) that the place of the soul is with Hadad; (2) that the soul accompanies the supreme god even in the sacrifices to him, and acts as intercessor; (3) that souls "participate in the nature and privileges of the gods whose habitual *cortége* they form." Halévy had previously maintained, in regard to the *Phœnicians*, (1) their belief that the soul is immortal; (2) that the souls of the just inhabit heaven in company with the gods. And he now claims "the essential agreement in this belief of the four great peoples, the Assyro-Babylonians, Hittites, Phœnicians, and Hebrews."

In this survey of Gentile opinion the literature to which we have referred belongs, for the most part, to a period preceding Moses and the Exodus, or at least the traditions upon which it has been founded are of this high antiquity.

The Hebrews, therefore, were encompassed by these conceptions on every side. And the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, unearthed in Egypt, have proved that literary communication between Babylonia, Palestine, and Egypt was an everyday occurrence in this early time. Hence the theology of none of these eastern countries could have remained unknown in the others. And we are compelled in interpreting the literature of one people to take into account the ideas of the others. Darmesteter, in his last work on the Gathas, emphasizes this in determining the sources of the ideas of the Avesta. He even suggests the Babylonian psalms as a possible source of the Avestan doctrine of the resurrection. And if there is any probability of this, there is no need of any incredulity respecting the presence of this doctrine in Jerusalem in Isaiah's time. Indeed it is clear, that, if the Hebrews had no belief in a future of blessedness for the righteous, they were much more benighted than their neighbors—a condition to which few would assign them. For a definite belief in immortality is

proved by all history to have been the concomitant of worthy ideas of the deity and high moral standards of action.

Darmesteter affirms the borrowing of much in the Avesta from Judaism. True, he puts this indebtedness late historically. But the early date of the Gathas, which Mills still maintains in his last great work on the "Five Gathas," would not remove them from the probability of this borrowing, nor the Zoroastrian system generally; for what we have said above of intercommunication in the ancient East holds true doubtless of Media, as well as Babylon. It would have been an impossibility, we may now say, for monotheism to have come out of Egypt with Israel and been established in Palestine and not have become known where Zoroastrianism arose. And it is much simpler to refer the points of agreement between Mosaism and Zoroastrianism to a Hebrew origin than to maintain that there were two independent parallel developments. Even if we admit the coming of Persian ideas into Judaism at and after the exile, as well we may, it will then be but the payment of an old debt. Streams of thought which had been one at an earlier date, became one again after a more or less independent course for centuries.

In the Magian system we find wonderfully clear ideas of immortality and personal accountability to God under the sanction of future rewards and punishments; and we are entitled to avail ourselves of this fact, i. e. the presumptions flowing from it, in explaining everything in the Pentateuch which touches upon these ideas. And, as I have already intimated, the associated ideas of human relations to God must be given great weight in interpreting whatever is said of the future. Pertinent to this is an article of Dr. Sellin in the *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift* (1894-96), in which he proves that *the individual in his relations to God* was quite as important an element in the early Hebrew religion as the nation considered as a whole; and that personal moral accountability to God was never absent from the Jewish system. It

is impossible, therefore, not to admit a presumption that they held to some belief in future blessing from and with God for the good after death.

THE DIRECT EVIDENCE.

We come now to the direct evidence in Hebrew literature of opinion regarding the state of the dead. And to begin with, the Hebrews were taught that man "became a living soul" by the *breath of God*, and that, being thus created, he was in the *image of God*. Man thus partook, to them, of the nature of the spiritual and eternal God. And we find here the basis of the developed doctrine of a later time that at death "the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (Eccl. xii. 7).

Their next lesson was in the life and departure of Enoch. "Enoch walked with God, and was not, for God took him." His method of closing life was designed as a reward; but they cannot have imagined for a moment that God dropped him, for a reward, into an underworld of shadows and gloom. No: he walked with God here upon earth, and God took him where he could continue to enjoy that communion. And the fact was placed here at the beginning of the Hebrew revelation, in order to point the thoughts of all coming after in the same direction.

And this is the use the Epistle to the Hebrews makes of it. "*By faith Enoch was translated . . . for before his translation he had witness borne to him that he had been well-pleasing unto God.*"

The accounts of the deaths of Moses and Aaron are related to that of Enoch. At a particular time they are called to a mountain-top, and there die in a special manner, according to the word of the Lord. Nothing about it certainly suggests a falling into darkness "where no experience of communion with God is possible." On the contrary, the whole suggestiveness of the scene is that of ascending into a pres-

ence and life with God. Jacob's vision of the ladder also points in the same direction.

In the case of Abraham, God enters into a covenant of promise for himself and his descendants (Gen. xv.). As an introduction to that covenant, he says: "I am thy *exceeding great reward*"; and, as a part of it: "Thou shalt go to thy fathers *in peace*." It is impossible, without violence, to interpret these words of a death clouded with uncertainty and gloom as to the future. Abraham was to die *in peace* and find in God his *exceeding great reward*. He was to die *in covenant with God*, and the great emphasis in all God's covenant promises was on life. In this way God comes to meet and undo the incoming of death by the first sin. He restores man to his original endowment of life. His original life was not that of the body alone, but of his whole nature. The very idea, therefore, of a redeeming covenant was an assurance to the Hebrews of noble life in the future in the care of God their Creator. Reflective minds capable of giving us the earliest literature of Israel must have reached the belief of a future in communion with God as a necessary progress of thought.

But they did not stop with this. They must have believed in a "heaven" with their fathers who had kept their covenant with God. The inspired language which indicates this is the phrase used of the patriarchs—"was gathered unto his people." These words are specifically distinguished from death. Thus of Abraham (Gen. xxv. 8): "Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died . . . *and* was gathered unto his people." So of Isaac: "And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, *and* was gathered unto his people." So also of Jacob and Aaron. Here we have the future life in the society of ancestors, which was the common expectation of primitive Oriental peoples. What we call "heaven" was to them *life with God and their fathers*. If any one ask objectingly, Why was not this glorious idea of society with God more dis-

tinctly set forth to the Hebrews? we may perhaps find that they were guarded at this point against the polytheistic notions of surrounding peoples. Familiar association in the heavens with the gods belonged to ideas in heathen corruptions. But in the line of revelation the idea of familiarity with God was reserved for the incarnation and the ascension to the right hand of God, of the Son of God and Son of man. "Through him we have boldness to enter into the holiest."

THE MEANING OF SHEOL.

It remains then to determine what we should understand by what is said of Sheol. The word occurs six times in the Pentateuch—four times from the mouths of Jacob and Judah regarding the effect upon the father of the fate of Joseph and Benjamin, and twice of the destruction of Korah and his company. In the case of Jacob it is a part of his "mourning for his son many days" and his feeling that the sad event must cause the end of his own days in disappointment and darkness. In the case of Korah it is used to describe a death of judgment for sin, and of visible engulfing by earthquake. It has been said that Jacob is speaking of going to the usual abode of the dead, because he says: "I will go down into Sheol *unto my son*." But it must be remembered that he supposes that Joseph had died a calamitous death and been denied burial. Sheol then, in all these passages, stands for the mournful side of death and the grave, as the negation of life, its joyousness and blessing, including the coming to one's end in peace. It is precisely similar to our own language of death and the grave when looked at from this negative point of view, which, however, is never thought of as implying any doubt of a happy future of the spirit.

This explanation is borne out by the use of Sheol in the other Hebrew scriptures. It occurs in the prayer of Hannah and the Song of David (1 Sam. ii. 6; 2 Sam. xxii. 6), both lyrics, and so giving poetic views. It is found in 1 Kings

ii. 6-9 in threatenings of violent death. In Job, the Psalms, and the Prophets it has a constant poetic, elegiac use, so that we may sum up by saying, that it is confined to poetry or visions of calamity, and *never used of any prose conception of the rational thought regarding the future life*. It leaves us at full liberty to believe all the evidence that happy hopes for the future coexisted with mournful views of death, precisely as the two sets of ideas have coexisted under the Christian system. Who has spoken more darkly of death than our own poets? Death, as the negation of life in the present, must always be so spoken of; but faith and hope are not made doubtful thereby.

Some, as Tayler Lewis in Lange (English edition), say that Sheol must be distinguished from the "grave" because the Hebrew has another word (*kereb*) for "tomb." But those who will look at the use of this word will see that it is limited generally, if not always, to the visible sepulcher, and not employed in ideal relations, as is Sheol. And we do not contend that Sheol indicates "the grave" narrowly, but the world of death and the grave as the antithesis of life in this world. The Chaldean legend of Istar's descent to Hades is apparently the original of all the "journeys to the dead," and was a sufficient warrant for all the Hebrew poets have said of Sheol, but was no actual or proper source of dogma for the future life to such as were capable of thinking for themselves.

We have said nothing thus far of any belief among the early Hebrews of the future for the wicked. But we find language in the Pentateuch which certainly forms an indication that opinion on this matter was not wanting. The sinner is threatened with death in a most emphatic manner: "He shall surely die" (Heb. dying he shall die). Again it is frequently said of him: "He shall bear his sin." And more dreadful still are the words: "That soul shall be cut off from his people." This phrase is used thirteen times in the

Pentateuch. In Lev. xx. 2-3 and xvii. 10 it is distinguished from death, and made the culmination of divine threatening. It is denounced in various connections, as of ritual disobedience, violation of the Sabbath, and of abominable vices. But in every case it is of definite disobedience to a divine command. It did not involve the execution of the death penalty except in the case of a civil offense. In other cases, commentators, as Knobel, say that God himself completed the excommunication or rejection. But what was this rejection by God when "He set his face against the sinner"? The thoughtful Hebrew, who saw the prospect of blessing in the future from the covenant of God under which he lived, and from the doctrine of life as a gift restored by God, what could he infer from the cutting off of souls from the people of God? What, but the loss of promise and hope for the future, and the antithesis of the great promise of life which was ever sounding in his ears? To be shut out from the covenant of Jehovah was the end of all vision of blessing for life here or hereafter. And to see this was a sufficient belief of future chastisement. And there was a noble dignity in this, as compared with the wild polytheistic notions of the nations by whom the Jews were surrounded; and also as compared with the horrors of apocalyptic imagination, which were so abundantly developed in the later days of cruel persecutions of the Jews by relentless enemies. No transgressor, therefore, could come to his death feeling that he had not been abundantly warned of possible judgment to come.

LATER JEWISH VIEWS.

The development, in later Jewish literature, of a more distinct doctrine of a future life, and the words of Christ himself imply such views in the early days as we have supposed. In Ps. xlix. the author shows a clear sense of the difference between Sheol and the abode of the blessed, and so in Ps. xvi. and lxxiii. Talmudic and apocryphal writings make

Adam and Abraham to preside over their pious descendants. Abraham's bosom is paradise; and Fourth Maccabees associates Isaac and Jacob with Abraham in this, using the plural, *εἰς τοὺς κόλπους*. And in the closing lines of this book the martyrs are said to be gathered into the company (*εἰς πατέρων χορόν*) of the fathers and to receive from God pure and immortal lives (*ψυχάς*). Christ takes up this tradition when he makes Lazarus to be received to Abraham's bosom; and, again, when he makes the saved to come from the east and the west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When asked if there were few that were saved, he replied: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out." In regard to the resurrection, he said: "God said, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living." We have here Christ's authority for saying that God spake to Moses as having the "living" patriarchs in his holy keeping, and we must take it for granted that Moses so understood him. Certainly this does not mean Sheol as the exegetes have conceived it.

The home of the fathers, therefore, in the keeping of their covenant God was the heaven of the Hebrews.