Professor Baentsch on Monotheism.

By Harold M. WIENER, M.A., LL.B.

DR. BRUNO BAENTSCH, Professor of Theology at the University of Jena, and a Higher Critic of the Wellhausen School, has published a book on Monotheism in Israel and the Ancient East,[1] which is in someways worthy of careful attention. The subtitle of the volume indicates that the author is breaking with the evolutionary theory of the religion of Israel ; and closer examination of the volume shows the somewhat remarkable course that has brought him to a view which, if adopted, would make waste-paper of a large portion of the modern critical literature.

In some respects the work is obscure. The author is rather apt to put forward a particular view on one page, and then to make a remark several pages later which completely answers that view. The result is that the reader is left in doubt as to whether Baentsch connected the two or not in his own mind; but this criticism applies to minor details, and does not affect the main argument.

Apart from some introductory remarks which need not detain us, the book falls into three parts. In Part I. (pp. 2-42) the monotheistic tendencies in various Eastern religions are examined; in Part II. (pp. 42-48) the monotheism of Israel is contrasted with these beliefs; in Part III. (pp. 48-109) an endeavour is made to connect the two, to sketch in outline the development of the religion of Israel, and to criticize the evolutionary hypothesis. Part I. is good, Part II. is excellent, but on the bulk of Part III. a less favourable verdict must be pronounced.

Beginning with the religion of Babylonia, our author divides his consideration of it into three portions, devoted respectively to the popular religion, the religion of devout individuals, and

[1] "Altorientalischer und israelitischer Monotheismus Ein Wort zur Revision der Entwicklungsgeschichtlichen Auffassung der israelitischen Religionsgeschichte." Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1906.

the religion of the priests. Obviously there can be no question of monotheistic currents in the beliefs of the lower classes. But if we put these aside and take the national religion, we find that in nearly every Babylonian pantheon there is a *summus deus*, a king of the gods. Moreover, special localities revered special gods, Ur being peculiarly the home of Sin's worship, Agade of Ishtar's, and so on; and these gods had more than a local importance. One is inevitably reminded of the creeds of ancient Hellas and Rome, from which many of these phenomena may be paralleled, without, however, any suggestion of true monotheism being possible; but Baentsch takes no thought of this. On the contrary, he points out that in the Babylonian hymns are found expressions that verge on monotheism. He quotes two instances relating to Sin; the first contains the phrase, "Father, begetter of *gods* and men," which Baentsch allows to pass unnoticed—a sign that his *flair* for the differentia between monotheism and polytheism is scarcely as keen as it might be. However, he himself apparently finds his quotations convincing. "It must be assumed that one who speaks of a god in these terms no longer has any room in his heart for other gods" (p. 9). Unfortunately, Baentsch then immediately proceeds to tell us facts that recall the problem that perplexed poor Twemlo's brain, in "Our Mutual Friend," Who really was Veneering's oldest and dearest friend? For, having proved to his own satisfaction that the worship of Sin contained monotheistic tendencies, Baentsch proceeds to do the like for Marduk (Merodach) and Ishtar, and to state (p. 10) that similar evidence could be produced for each of the great gods. But, then, if each of the principal members of a pantheon was the oldest and dearest friend, would it not be sounder to regard the expression as slightly rhetorical? In other words, does not Baentsch's own evidence rebut the conclusions that he desires to draw from the exaggerated language of some hymns? Flattery is not unknown in dealing with earthly powers; does it not look as if the ancient Babylonians used it in their dealings with the Divine? The matter need not be pursued further, as

on pages 10 and 11 Baentsch proceeds to prove that these hymns do not spell monotheism, and one wonders what led him to make the unqualified statement that has been quoted.

This rather lengthy discussion of a few pages of the book may serve to illustrate the method in which our author often comes to a right decision after appearing to favour the opposite view, and will enable us to deal more briefly with what follows.

Baentsch next considers the belief of pious individuals, as evidenced by the penitential psalms (pp. 12-19). After some discussion, in which, again, expressions may be found that appear to go rather far in the opposite direction, he concludes that these psalms do not really evidence a monotheistic tendency, and he rightly lays stress on the perpetual occurrence of *a goddess* side by side with a god. The ascription of the sexual principle to the Divine is the negation of monotheism.

The portion dealing with the priestly speculation (pp. 19-35) is, unfortunately, too technical for a short summary. The religion of the ancient Babylonians was an *astral* religion, so that their theological learning was really astrological. Baentsch therefore plunges into astrological details. Perhaps the best thing to do will be to give a single example of his argument. Marduk (Merodach) represents the summer sun, Nebo the winter sun. Therefore Marduk + Nebo = sun. In Babylon on New Year's Day, the day of the spring equinox, the statue of Nebo was taken in procession to the Temple of Marduk. According to Baentsch, this really meant to the priests that Nebo resigned to Marduk for the summer half-year the sovereignty that he had exercised during the winter. This is to him a clear example of the way in which the monotheistic conception of Marduk and Nebo, as partial appearances of the sun-god, found peculiar expression in the polytheistic cultus. (Baentsch's speculations on this subject do not look convincing in cold print, but in fairness to a view with which I disagree it should be stated that no summary could do them justice.) By reasoning of this sort Baentsch is led to the conclusion that the different gods are at bottom not independent powers, but merely

partial manifestations of the Divine might which reveals itself in the universe (p. 33).

Then he quotes the well-known text :[1]

> "Ninib is Marduk of Strength,
> Nergal is Marduk of War," etc.

The tablet is defective, but it certainly identified many of the deities with Marduk.

I refrain from examining the argument too closely, because the answer to all this is given later by Baentsch himself in a single pregnant word, which may conceivably have been suggested to him by the modern history of his own country. Speaking of the God of Israel, he says that He was a *unitary* God—"Er ist ein *einiger* Gott" (p. 45). A few moments' reflection shows that this goes to the root of the matter. Monotheism is not a series of equations.

Baentsch then passes to Egypt. Here the most important document is undoubtedly the beautiful hymn to the Aten, of which a translation will be found in the second volume of Professor Petrie's "History of Egypt."[2] To all appearance this cult was monotheistic, but experience suggests that one caution at any rate may not be wholly superfluous. The views that are entertained on the worship of the Aten, as practised under Amenophis IV., are in the main based on a single hymn, and after our Babylonian experience we are less than ever inclined to trust to theories that rest on narrow evidentiary foundations. Subject, however, to the doubt that this consideration must prompt, it may be said that the hymn appears to embody a faith that approaches far more nearly to monotheism than the religion of Babylonia. But the Aten-worship is the worship of the sun—nothing more—and is very far removed from the monotheism of Israel, as Baentsch himself points out later on (pp. 46, 47).

Pages 39-42 deal with Syria, Phœnicia, and Canaan. Here,

[1] English readers will find it in T. G. Pinches' "Religion of Babylonia and Assyria," p. 118, or "The Old Testament in the Light of the Historical Records," second edition, p. 58.

[2] Third edition, pp. 215-218.

again, Baentsch appears to lay too much stress on the monarchical tendencies of the various pantheons. Given the fact that a particular god is described as king of the gods, or lord of heaven, we are still a very long way off from anything that should be regarded as monotheism. One is inevitably reminded of the pantheons of Greece and Rome. It would not be difficult to parallel the evidence on which Baentsch relies from Greek literature, and, indeed, to find passages that go beyond anything he adduces. The lines of Æschylus suggest themselves:

> Ζεύς ἐστιν αἰθήρ, Ζεὺς δὲ γῆ, Ζεὺς δ' οὐρανός,
> Ζεύς τοι τὰ πάντα χὤτι τῶνδ' ὑπέρτερον.[1]

How easy it would be to spin theories of Greek pantheism and its monotheistic tendencies if this were all we had of the literature of Hellas, or even of the writings of Æschylus! And how false such theories are seen to be in the light of our present knowledge!

Part II. (pp. 42-48) deals with the difference between the monotheism of Israel and the various tendencies noted in Part I. It is entirely admirable, and I can only express the hope that when English critics proceed to copy Baentsch—as they doubtless will—they may have the wisdom to adopt this portion of his work in its entirety, and without introducing any blunders of their own.

To deal justly with Part III. of the book is a more difficult and delicate task. It is impossible to realize the unfortunate position in which Baentsch found himself without first noting an extraordinary unwritten rule to which the work of the higher critics is apparently made to conform. That rule may be stated thus: Any statement made by an advanced critic of sufficient eminence must be accepted as true by his fellow-critics *without any independent examination of the evidence*, provided only that the statement is sufficiently novel and improbable. Now, in this instance, Baentsch found that a theory of Kuenen's as to the origin and growth of Israelitish monotheism was accepted

[1] Æsch., frag. 70 (Sidgwick).

by the critics. This theory he desired to displace. The obvious way of doing so would have been to produce the Biblical evidence that refuted the theory; to show from documents, believed by Kuenen to be early, that monotheism was axiomatic long before (on the theory) it had been invented; to confront the statements made by Kuenen under the influence of the theory with the entirely contradictory statements made by the same Kuenen under the influence of the evidence.[1] But having regard to the unwritten law, to which allusion has been made, this course was not open to Baentsch; indeed, it has probably never even occurred to him to test the accuracy of any statement of Kuenen's. Accordingly, he takes his courage in both hands and starts on some theorizing, of which one or two specimens must suffice.

Abram is connected with Ur-chasdim and Haran, two centres of the worship of the moon-god Sin. Moreover, Sin was honoured as the "compassionate, merciful father" in Ur-chasdim, and Abram's name points in this direction. Further, the names Sara and Milka (*vide* Gen. xi. 29) correspond to the names of goddesses who were worshipped in Haran jointly with Sin.[2] But, above all, the number 318 in Gen. xiv. 14 corresponds to the 354 days of a lunar year less thirty-six days—three days in each of the twelve months—during which the moon is invisible. In fact, the moon-god—like King Charles's head—is always coming in. But is it not possible that some readers may laugh at this treatment of the "Abram myth"? Might they not even regard Baentsch's "evidence" as moonshine? A prescient mind makes timely preparation for such contingencies. He who should regard all this as due to chance "might easily run the risk of no longer being taken seriously in serious matters" (p. 61).

[1] This has been done by the present writer in the "Bibliotheca Sacra" for October, 1907, pp. 609-637.

[2] The basis for this is as follows: Jensen connected Sara with the name of a moon-goddess of Haran, and subsequently changed his mind. On that authority Zimmern puts the idea forward tentatively, as also an identification of Milka with an epithet of Ishtar (Schrader, "Die Keilinschriften und das alte Testament," third edition, pp. 364, 365).

It is unnecessary—it would certainly be cruel—to follow Baentsch step by step in his wanderings. In the Mosaic age he even seems conscious of some difficulties. The God of Israel has recently been regarded by German professors as a god of the storm or weather, localized on Sinai, and in accordance with the canon to which attention has been drawn, Baentsch, of course, accepts this. But, then, what about the moon-god? Well, Sinai can be connected with Sin. There must have been sacrificial worship of the god Sin on Mount Sinai (p. 69). Further, there is a desert of Sinai and also a desert of Sin (p. 70). And then the Minæans in Midian worshipped the moon-god as their *summus deus*, and there was a Midianitish sanctuary under Jethro at Sinai = Horeb (Ex. iii. 1 *et seq.*—p. 71). The New Moon and the Sabbath are lunar feasts. Moreover, Passover began on the fourteenth of Nisan, the evening when the moon was full in the spring-time. This proves to demonstration that the ancestors of Israel were once worshippers of the moon-god (p. 72).

I refrain from dealing further with this portion of the book. It is entirely symptomatic of the condition into which Biblical studies have fallen, and should lead those who care for the Bible or for scholarship to consider whether radical changes in the method of training theologians and Semitic philologists are not essential.

On p. 87 Baentsch comes to the conclusion that the God of the spiritual experiences of Moses was *no longer* an astral Deity ("kein Sterngott mehr"), but a God above the stars—a living, mighty, ethical personality—standing above Nature and the elements as their lord and master. This is monotheism *in nuce*, practical monotheism, from which, however, even a Moses would not draw the true monotheistic inferences. Next, various characteristics of the religion are brought into relation with this view—the imageless nature of the worship, the lack of a sexual conception of the Godhead, the absence of all mythology, the jealous intolerance of the God of Israel Who will suffer no god beside Him, the ethical conception of His nature. Much

of this is nearer to the conservative position than to some recent views. On p. 90 the assertion is made that Moses did not advance to the stage of coupling the monotheistic conception with the idea of universality. (As a matter of fact, this assertion is negatived by the statement on the next page that the God Who, according to His inmost nature, was a universal God, entered into a special relation with a particular people by means of a covenant.) Baentsch then proceeds to assert that Moses did not reflect that this God could—or, indeed, must—have a positive relation to other peoples; in fact, such a reflection must have been strange to him as a child of his age, for antiquity only knows national religions. But, then, Baentsch forgets that the argument from antiquity is worthless; for, if the history of Israel be put aside, antiquity knows nothing of universal gods entering into special relations with particular peoples, or of a covenant link between a god and a people.

A protest is next entered against the view that the God of Israel was not regarded as the God of Heaven or the Creator till the eighth century (pp. 91-93), and here, again, Baentsch is nearer the conservative position.

Pages 94-105 are devoted to a sketch of the history of the conception of the Deity from Moses onwards. In outline, Baentsch's view is that the practical monotheism of Moses was merely a national religion, and recognized the existence of other gods—gods of the heathen, with which Israel had no relation. This was reinforced in Canaan by a theoretical monotheism due to the acceptance of Babylonian myths and speculations. Subsequently the prophets of the eighth century connected the national god with the universal god, and fused the two into an organic unity (pp. 104, 105). Criticism of all this appears quite superfluous until we know whether the theory is destined to make any converts.

The book concludes with a criticism of the development hypothesis from Baentsch's point of view (pp. 105-109). The true method of disposing of this theory has already been indicated; but it is satisfactory to find a professor of theology

breaking with the notion that the pre-Mosaic age was a period of animistic worship of trees, stones, and wells, totemism, ancestor-worship, etc. (p. 107).

It will probably appear to most readers that the book is not unduly conservative; but it is amusing to note that a writer in the *Expositor*[1] ingenuously tells us that "it will be viewed with mixed feelings," because, "if modern criticism has belittled the religion of the early Hebrew tribes" (p. 79), or "has regarded the monotheism of the patriarchs as due to later theory (p. 53) . . . this is precisely what has been repeated frequently by those who are not literary critics."

It is certainly pleasant to reflect that a member of the Wellhausen school has made some attempt to think for himself; but the thoughtful reader will rise from the perusal of the book with the conviction that in his main thesis—the endeavour to bring Hebrew monotheism into connexion with the religious tendencies of the ancient East—Professor Baentsch's efforts have been directed to the exploration of a cul-de-sac.

The Commercial Side of the Spanish Inquisition.

By G. G. COULTON, M.A.

THE three volumes already published of Dr. Lea's monumental "History of the Spanish Inquisition" supply abundant food for thought in many directions; of which not the least interesting is the intimate connexion between finance and intolerance. His first chapters bring out with startling clearness the natural tendency of the Spaniards, even in the Middle Ages, to accept religious differences almost as philosophically as they are accepted in our own day. It needed the constant efforts of the clergy to keep Christian, Jew, and Moor from fraternizing together. There were, of course, periodical massacres of the

[1] *Expositor*, Seventh Series, No. 11, November, 1906, p. 478.