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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

Fourteen years ago Professor Sayce published his Hibbert Lectures on the Religion of the Ancient Babylonians. He has published much since then. But nothing has approached that book, either in matter or in style, until this month, when there has appeared his Gifford Lectures on *The Religions of Ancient Egypt and Babylonia.*

Fourteen years is a long time in the study of the Religions of the Ancient East. But Professor Sayce has been alive all the time. If progress has been made, he is aware of it. Nor has he ever been accused of the worship of his own past self. He can read his Hibbert Lectures over again and acknowledge the ignorance and immaturity that are in them. If progress has been made, he can describe the Religions of Egypt and Babylonia in the light of the knowledge we now possess.

In the study of the Religion of Babylonia Professor Sayce does not think that much progress has been made. With Egypt it may be otherwise. He thinks that with the Religion of Egypt it *is* otherwise. And he thinks the difference is chiefly due to the genius of one man, Professor Maspero. His words are: 'Thanks more especially to Professor Maspero's unrivalled combination of learning and genius, we are beginning to learn what the old Egyptian faith actually was.'

But of the Religion of Babylonia, he says, it is not yet possible to write a systematic description. The materials are too scanty. There are too many gaps in the inscriptions and in our knowledge of them. We must wait until the buried libraries of Chaldæa have been excavated, and all their contents studied. And we must wait for the man of genius. For Professor Sayce does not seem to see that his own unrivalled combination of learning and imagination is doing for Babylonia what Professor Maspero has done for Egypt.

Professor Sayce writes on the Religion of both Egypt and Babylonia. Nowhere at this moment can we find so compact and so clear a description of either. But there is a difference. Professor Sayce tells us that it is only of the Religion of Egypt that a satisfactory account can be given. Yet it is where the materials are most scanty and the conclusions drawn from them most precarious that Professor Sayce is most at home. It is to his brief but brilliant description of the Religion of Babylonia that we wish to turn for a moment.

When Professor Sayce wrote his Hibbert Lectures he had discovered the necessity of distinguishing between the Semitic and the non-Semitic elements in the Babylonian Religion. He insists on that necessity still. But now he has discovered another. Not only must we distinguish between

the earlier Sumerian and the later Semitic elements, which in their combination make up what we call the Babylonian Religion, but in the Babylonian Religion itself we must distinguish between what is ancient and what is comparatively modern. There are texts which show themselves to be a combination of Sumerian and Semitic ideas, but still belong to the old crude mythological stage of Babylonian Religion; and there are texts which are as manifestly the product of a late reflective and theological era.

The best example is the Babylonian account of the Creation. The narrative with which we are most familiar, since its discovery by Mr. George Smith in 1872, is a poem of late date. It has been called the 'Epic of Creation,' but the title is ill applied. For 'it belongs to an age of religious syncretism and materialistic philosophy; the mythological beings of popular belief are resolved into cosmological principles, and the mythological dress in which they appear has a theatrical effect. The whole poem,' continues Professor Sayce, 'reminds us of the stilted and soulless productions of the eighteenth century. It is only here and there, as in the description of the contest with Tiamât, or in the concluding lines (if, indeed, they belong to the poem at all), that it rises above the level of dull mediocrity.'

But there is another version of the story of the the Creation. It carries its antiquity on its face, for it is written in the ancient Sumerian language. Its author dwelt, not in inland Babylon, but in ancient Eridu, on the shores of the Persian Gulf. His land was marshy land, where reeds and rushes grew—

> All the earth was sea,
> While in the midst of the sea was a water-course.
> Moss and seed-plant of the marsh, reed and rush he created,—
> He created the green herb of the field.

And his conception of Creation was the formation of land out of the deep, just as he had often seen it formed at home. When the early inhabitant of Eridu sought a homestead on the shore, he gathered the reeds together, made them up in bundles, and built the bundles into a weir across the waters. The sea was restrained, the dry land appeared; by and by he could sow his seed and build his house. It was so in the beginning of the world. All was a chaos of waters. Ea tied his reeds together and formed the habitable earth—

> Merodach tied [reeds] together to form a weir in the water,
> He made dust and mixed it with the reeds of the weir,
> That the gods might dwell in the seat of their well-being.

But although this poem is written in the language of Sumer, it is not purely Sumerian theology. The priests of Babylon have had it through their hands. They have appropriated it for the honour of their own god Merodach. Everywhere they have removed the name of Ea, the old sea-god of Eridu on the shores of the Persian Gulf, and have inserted in its place the name of Bel-Merodach, the sun-god of the inland city of Babylon.

They have also made interpolations here and there—

> In those days was Eridu built and the temple of Ê-Saggil founded,
> Ê-Saggil wherein dwells the divine king of the holy mound in the midst of the deep.
> Babylon was built, Ê-Saggil completed;
> The spirits of the earth were created together,
> They called it by the mighty name of the holy city, the seat of their well-being.

Professor Sayce has no hesitation in saying that the last three lines have been interpolated. And with the interpolation the priests have introduced confusion. The Ê-Saggil of the first two lines is the temple of Ea in Eridu. The Ê-Saggil of the next three is the temple of Bel-Merodach in Babylon.

The revision of this early poem was plainly the work of the priests of the patron god of Babylon. Even before their deliberate revision, however,

the poem may have gathered together primitive Sumerian and Semitic ideas of the creation of the world, and formed them into one, to make the religion Babylonian. The doctrine of the Trinity is in it, and cannot be so easily separated from it. Yet the trinity is formed of gods and their sanctuaries that were partly Sumerian and partly Semitic. But this combination of primitive elements, and even the revision by the priests of Babylon, must be distinguished from the far later theological or philosophical writing to which the 'Epic of the Creation' belongs.

The difference between the earlier and the later stories of the Creation of the World is very great. But it is as nothing to the difference between both these stories and the narrative which we have in Genesis. And yet the narrative as we have it in Genesis is almost certainly derived from the Babylonian. Whence the difference then? Professor Sayce calls it 'an impassable gulf,' and he says: 'For the explanation of this gulf I can find only one explanation, unfashionable and antiquated though it be. In the language of a former generation, it marks the dividing-line between revelation and unrevealed religion. It is like that "something," hard to define, which separates man from the ape, even though on the physiological side the ape may be the ancestor of the man.'

If a man reaches communion with God, does it matter how he reaches it? It does not greatly matter. If he gains it apart from Christ, will Christ grudge him his glorious gain? Christ will not grudge it. The most resolute endeavour in modern times to show that a man may attain to communion with God apart from Christ was made by Dr. James Martineau, and may be read in his recently published *Life and Letters*.

Dr. Martineau believed that man is both natural and supernatural. He is natural in so far as he is within the range of the laws of nature. He is supernatural in so far as he is endowed with spiritual capacities, open to the appeal of the Spirit of God, and capable of responding to that appeal. For God is a Spirit, personal, moral; and man is a spirit, personal, moral. The Spirit of God is ever making advances to the spirit of man, and it is open to man at any time to receive those advances, to enter into communication with God, and then pass into the joy of communion.

It is open to every man. 'From this immediate communion of Spirit with spirit, in which the initiative is with Him and the answer with us, no soul is shut out.' For in his early years Dr. Martineau had a remarkable experience. Born a Determinist, born to inherit a philosophy which denied every vestige of human responsibility, which boldly said that as *nothing goes wrong* no man can ever accuse himself of having *done wrong*, Dr. Martineau accepted his paralysing inheritance, embodied it in his lectures, and for ten dreary years taught it to the students of Manchester New College. But then his conscience revolted. And in its revolt Dr. Martineau cast away more than the philosophical doctrine of Necessity. He cast away also the theological doctrine of the depravity of the human will. It was in 1839 that he preached the sermon on 'The Christian View of Moral Evil,' and insisted upon the 'personal origin and personal identity' of sin. In 1841 he wrote and published an essay on 'The Five Points of Christian Faith,' and the first of the five was 'The truth of the moral perceptions in man,—not as the degenerate Churches of our day teach, their pravity and blindness.' Then in 1852, in 'The Ethics of Christendom,' one of the best known of his magazine articles, he laid it down that the fundamental idea of Christendom is 'the ascent through Conscience into communion with God,' and declared, 'Neither do we believe with Luther, that human nature is a mere devilish anarchy, reducible only by supernatural irruption.'

It is open to every man to hear the voice of God within and to obey it. In 1885, it is true, in a letter to Mr. R. H. Hutton, Dr. Martineau says:

'There is a Revealing Presence of God in every soul *that is not sunk in slavery to the mere natural man.*' But that sentence seems a momentary aberration. Elsewhere, so far as we have seen, Dr. Martineau consistently maintains that there is no soul of man but may, and there is no soul of man but sooner or later does, listen to the voice of God and live. The last of the 'Five Points of Christianity' is this: 'A universal Immortality, after the model of Christ's heavenly life; an immortality not of capricious and select salvation, with unimaginable torment as the general lot, but, *for all*, a life of spiritual development, of retribution, of restoration.'

Now, it is in the Conscience that the Spirit of God and the spirit of man come together. This simple statement is the key to all Dr. Martineau's philosophy, all his ethics, and all his theology. We need not wonder at it. The great discovery of his life was the discovery of his Conscience. There had been reserves and misgivings for a time. He went to his sister Harriet with them. She felt them not; and her stronger faith that whatever is is right gave him assurance for a time. But Conscience would not go to sleep again. And the moment that it asserted itself, saying, 'Thou shalt not,' he believed that he came into direct contact as a moral responsible person with the moral personality of God. Spirit had answered Spirit. And he never wavered from that belief.

It is in the Conscience that the spirit of man answers to the Spirit of God. 'In the struggles of Conscience . . . as well as in the awful warnings of shame and remorse'—these are his words. And so Dr. Martineau never had any hesitation in saying that Ethics precedes Religion. It was no accident that produced and published *Types of Ethical Theory* before *A Study of Religion*. He held by the priority of Ethics with all its consequences. When pressed to say *why* Ethics must come first, he answered, because the ethical consciousness reveals the presence of an authority that is in us but not of us, and which we spontaneously feel has a right to govern us. And then he added that a man may rise from that spontaneous feeling into recognition of its divine source and pass on to the worship of God, when his Ethics becomes his Religion; or he may explain it all away, call the sense of obligation an illusion, a disguised form of self-interest, or the reflection upon him of the sentiments of society around him, and never know God or Religion.

It seems then that when the Spirit of God touches the spirit of a man in Conscience, the man may deny that it is the Spirit of God. This compels the question, How does a man know that the sting of Conscience or the stab of Remorse is the voice of the Spirit of God?

To that question Dr. Martineau gives two contradictory answers. His biographer admits that they are contradictory. For the most part he answers that a man simply feels it. He even says that, 'finding a Holy of Holies within us, we need not curiously ask whether its secret voices are of ourselves or of the Father.' But on the other hand, throughout his two great philosophical works, *Types of Ethical Theory* and *A Study of Religion*, as Professor Upton confesses, he 'does not recognize in our moral consciousness a direct apprehension of God's presence and character, but, on the contrary, by a *process of inference* reaches the idea of God.' And we have already seen that he allows this process of inference or reasoning to go so far with some men *in the wrong direction* that the Spirit of God is reasoned away altogether.

This is more than inconsistency. It is weakness. It is the first time that we have found Dr. Martineau's theology open to serious objection. If a man rises from Morality to Religion directly, what assurance has he, or what guarantee have we, that his intuition is the actual voice of God? Dr. Martineau answers that 'anyone who feels himself possessed spontaneously of ideas of whose truth he is unable to doubt, which he is

unable to do otherwise than obey, is entitled to feel himself under the influence of a divine mission.' It is an extraordinary answer. How many cranks and blasphemers have believed themselves possessed spontaneously of ideas which they thought they could not do otherwise than obey!

Nor is Dr. Martineau free from misfortune when he says that the knowledge of God is a reflection, a process of inference from the pangs of Conscience. The actual recognition of God steals slowly into the soul, he says, as the ideas of the beautiful in poetry and art steal gradually into the mind. But how many ever attain to the ideas of the beautiful in poetry and in art? 'Lord, are there few that be saved?' His answer was, 'Strive ye to enter in.' Dr. Martineau seems compelled, against all his instincts and all his beliefs, to answer very plainly, that they are few indeed.

This inconsistency is not an accident. It is of the essence of the belief that Conscience leads to God. And there are other contradictions and consequences.

Since morality comes first, it is not surprising to find Dr. Martineau suspicious of the ancient and modern method in missions. 'I will not say that undeveloped races, if evangelized, are no better for their baptism. But I do say that Christendom—nay, Christianity—is the worse for it; even if the recipient and the gift meet halfway, the religion of Christ becomes a shrivelled caricature, and loses its true grandeur and tender power.' So he would no longer have 'religious conversion' kept to the front as the *first* aggression to be made upon barbarism, but he would have 'a certain preparation of intelligence and conscience *before* the "heavens are opened" and the "Dove descends."' This in a letter to Mr. Bosworth Smith in 1887.

But if the end of Ethics is Religion, if the use of Conscience is to lead to God, and as speedily as possible, what is there in 'barbarism' to make this delay and preparation necessary? Dr. Martineau is anxious about the grandeur of Christianity. He would keep back the conversion of the heathen lest its 'tender power' be diminished. Paul was willing that he himself should be a castaway that others might be saved. And there is no evidence that he compelled the Corinthians (who had very little concern for the grandeur and tender power of Christianity) to wait until intelligence and conscience had made them a little more fit for the company of himself and the other apostles.

A deeper defect in Dr. Martineau's system is its helplessness in the presence of sin. It is a double helplessness. It neither rouses the Conscience nor knows what to do with it when it is roused. 'The Sense of Sin,' says Dr. Martineau, 'is the inevitable sorrow of an *imperfect* nature feeling the authority of a Perfect law planted in the Conscience.' And the italics are his own. Yet Dr. Martineau knows that there is such a thing as a 'Sense of Sin.' He calls it 'the sad weight whose burden oppresses every serious soul.' And he knows that he has no relief for it. 'The great strength,' he says, 'of the orthodox doctrine lies, no doubt, in the appeal it makes to the inward Sense of Sin; and the great weakness of Unitarianism has been its insensibility to this abiding sorrow of the human consciousness.' He cannot receive the 'orthodox' remedy. 'Better,' as he mildly puts it, 'to go to any Hell than to enter Heaven on its terms.' But for himself he can only offer 'penitence for the past purifying and improving the future.'

But the most singular result of Dr. Martineau's theology is that it shuts out Christ.

Dr. Martineau has the profoundest veneration for Jesus Christ. He never wavers, certainly, in reckoning Him 'a mere man.' He does not deny that in all intellectual matters He shared the defective knowledge of His day. He even admits that some day a 'higher human being' may appear on earth; for when Jesus said, 'Why callest

thou Me good? none is good save One, that is God,' did He not point to moral possibilities which He Himself did not exhaust? Nevertheless throughout the whole of his life Dr. Martineau held tenaciously to Christ's moral perfection. 'I receive Him and reverence Him,' he said when he was ordained, 'not merely for that sinless excellence which renders Him a perfect pattern to our race, but as the commissioned delegate of heaven, on whom the Spirit was poured without measure.' When he preached his farewell sermon to the Liverpool congregation, he said, 'In Christ alone is the reconciliation perfect between the human and the divine.' And as late as 1885 he wrote to Mr. R. H. Hutton, 'Identical in filial will with the Infinite Father's Perfection, is Jesus Christ, the moral incarnation of the Love of God.'

But if Jesus Christ was thus morally perfect, and if the ascent into communion with God is only through the conscience, surely Jesus Christ was shut out from that communion.

It might be supposed that Dr. Martineau's answer would be that it is in the temptation to sin, not in the sting of Conscience after sin has been committed, that God reveals Himself. And there are sentences in his letters which seem to point that way. But Dr. Martineau's biographer is perfectly clear, that that is not the answer which Dr. Martineau's theology affords us. Says Professor Upton, 'Though the Divine Ideal is ever more or less vividly present in our consciousness, and is that which gives to our life all its highest features, and all its truest charms and blessedness, yet it first distinctly reveals itself and its authority when it *resists* and *condemns* our personal desires and aims.' The italics are Professor Upton's. Jesus Christ could not have attained to communion with God through condemnation.

'Who then is this?' Two answers to the question have been considered. The first was the answer of the people among whom Jesus had been brought up, and who surely ought to have known Him. 'Is not this the carpenter's son?' they said. They claimed Him as theirs. They could count Him as one of themselves, as they could count His brothers and His sisters.

The second was the answer of the Father. 'This is My beloved Son.' It contradicted the householders of Nazareth. He is mine, it said; He is not yours. Do not count Him among your sons, He is Mine, My only-begotten and well-beloved.

But we remember that He gave Him up. He gave Him up, we say, to the people of Nazareth, to do whatever they pleased with Him. Let us not be premature. He did not give Him up to be the carpenter's son. He did not give Him up to be counted one of a family, to add to the population of a village. If they have no higher use for Him than that He is not theirs at all. 'This is *My* beloved Son.' He gave Him up, not to keep His life in Nazareth, but to give it up on Calvary. He gave Him up to die and only to die, because it is only if a corn of wheat fall into the earth and die that it brings forth fruit. He gave Him up to die, that He might receive Him back again, together with those whom He had given Him.

The third answer is, 'This is the Saviour of the World.' The first answer was the answer of the Jews, the third is the answer of the Samaritans. The Jews had Him. Jealous of their privilege, though not appreciating it, they would keep Him to themselves. The Samaritans had no privilege. They had no right in Him. They had only the sense of need, the sense of sin. But because He forgave their sin and satisfied their need, they called Him Saviour, and claimed Him at last as their own.

It may be that He stirred the sense of sin. 'Thou hast well said that thou hast no husband.'

And the woman went into the city: 'Come, see a man who stirred the sense of sin in me, who told me all that ever I did.' They thanked Him for calling them sinners and making them feel it. But most of all they thanked Him that when the sense of sin was roused He said, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee; go in peace.'

And then came their great leap of logic. 'If He is our Saviour He is the Saviour of the World.' The Jews could not have said that. 'If He is a Saviour He is our Saviour, and ours only,' the Jews would have said. But the Samaritans could say, 'If He saves the outcast Samaritans, there is no one in the wide world whom He cannot save.' 'This is the Saviour of the World.'

'This is the Saviour of the World.' Perhaps, we say; but a good half of the world is not worth saving. 'No dogs or Hottentots!' And it is strange to think that the portion of the world that is counted least worth saving now is the very portion that thought it needed no salvation then. When Dreyfus was standing his trial, the Pope said, 'Only a Jew charged with treason.' And we? We say the conversion of a Jew costs money; we count it up in pounds, shillings, and pence, and say, 'Not worth it.'

But 'This is the Saviour of the World.' It is the answer to every enumeration and every argument. Now, 'the carpenter's son' could not do it. And 'My beloved Son' could not do it. But when 'My beloved Son' has become the carpenter's son, and, looking forward to the decease that He is to accomplish at Jerusalem, is 'My beloved Son' still, then it can be done. Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.

The Best Bible Commentaries.

By Henry Bond, Borough Librarian, Woolwich.

In pursuing the vocation of a librarian it has been my lot and privilege to organize three public libraries during the last decade, and in attempting to stock them with the 'best books,' in no particular branch of literature have I found the problem a more difficult one than in the matter of commentaries on the books of the Bible. Difficult because we are in some respects overburdened with an *embarras de richesse* in our exegetical literature, and the difficulty of selection is aggravated rather than otherwise by the fact that many of the said 'riches' happen to be very 'poor.' In particular, one has long since been led to the conclusion, through hearing it much stated and by the voice of authority, that our well-known collected or general commentaries, dealing with the whole of the Bible, and each book by a different author, fail, without exception, to keep a high standard of excellence throughout. As well as the collected commentaries themselves being of vastly unequal merit, the quality of each volume in its own series differs greatly, in some cases being lamentably weak, if not even disgracefully done. Still, each of the great general commentaries contains, we are told, at least one or two volumes of conspicuous merit, and even, as a whole, have their own saving qualities. For example, the 'Speaker's Commentary' served, to not a small extent, the primary purpose for which it was intended; but, largely because it had a definite object, it is, on the whole, a failure, and especially on some of the books of the Old Testament. It contains little homiletic matter, is not very highly esteemed, and only a very few of the books are done well enough to be of especial value to the Bible student. The 'Pulpit Commentary,' on the other hand, is so overweighted with homiletics that it is only rarely worth while to purchase even individual volumes. On the contrary, most of the volumes of the new little 'Century Bible' are worth having, because, if for no other reason, they give very recent results in popular form.

Such criticisms as these, advanced in regard to