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1921.

THE 630TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,
WESTMINSTER, S.W., ON MONDAY, APRIL 18TH, 1921,
AT 4.30 P.M.

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR GEORGE K. SCOTT-MONCRIEFF, K.C.B.,
IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous meeting were read, confirmed and signed, and the HON. SECRETARY announced the Election of the following:—T. B. Hunter, Esq., O.B.E., W. H. Pibel, Esq., F.S.A., as Members, and Col. H. Biddulph, R.E., C.M.G., D.S.O., as an Associate.

The CHAIRMAN then called on the Rev. Canon J. T. Parfit, M.A., to read his paper on "Religion in Mesopotamia, and its Relation to the Prospects of Eastern Christendom," which was profusely illustrated by lantern slides.

RELIGION IN MESOPOTAMIA. By the Rev. Canon
J. T. PARFIT, M.A.

MESOPOTAMIA is a land of origins, and mankind is indebted to this cradle of the human race for many of its fundamental religious beliefs. To the earliest inhabitants of Babylonia the world was a mountainous island surrounded by the great "Deep." Below were the vaults of the seven zones of Hades, and above was the firmament which supported the waters of the heavenly ocean above, which was the dwelling of the great gods.

The stars were fixed in the firmament in such a way as to convey messages to men of their destinies, which messages could only be read by discreet astrologers.

The sun, they believed, came forth from a door of heaven in the east and entered, at even, the door in the west. The sun and the heavenly bodies were naturally worshipped by such believers.

The discoveries of Dr. Pinches and Mr. G. Smith brought to light the Babylonian stories of the Creation, the Fall and the great Flood, whose counterparts exist not only in the sacred Scriptures, but in the religious traditions of other nations in East and West.

Bel-Marduk was regarded as the Creator of the present order of things, and the struggle between light and darkness is symbolized by his fight with the Dragon of Chaos.

Rimmon and Hadad, Dagon and Tammuz were Babylonian gods that were subsequently worshipped in Syria. Tammuz is the same as the famous Greek Adonis, the youth of marvellous beauty, killed at a boar-hunt, whose blood was changed into flowers.

The prophet Ezekiel, who complains of the twenty-five men actually worshipping the sun with their backs to the door of the Temple, also speaks of the Israelitish women whom he saw in a vision weeping for Tammuz at the gate of the house of Jehovah (Ezek. viii, 14-16).

One of our photographs shows the place in the Lebanon where his festival was annually celebrated with peculiar pomp both here and at Alexandria.

Ishtar was the popular goddess worshipped everywhere, the wife of Tammuz, the Ashtoreth of Palestine, the Aphrodite of the Greeks, the Venus of the Romans. The image of Ishtar was sent into Egypt in the reign of Amenophis III, and the excavations at Carchemish show that the goddess of that great Hittite city was the Babylonian Ishtar. Amongst these excavations I was shown a Hittite shrine that resembled so closely the ordering of the Hebrew Temple that one might suppose David and Solomon had this model before them when constructing the great fane in Jerusalem.

Many minor features of modern religious belief were common in Babylonia 4000 years ago. The inscriptions clearly indicate a belief in the Divine Right of Kings. The *gods* raised the monarchs to the thrones of their respective countries and made them the rightful rulers.

As with the Hebrews, sacrifices and offerings were made to the gods, rites of purification existed, great lavers stood at the entrance to the temples, incense was burnt in honour of the gods, to whom hymns were sung, accompanied by wind instruments and harps. The priesthood was apparently hereditary as with the Levites, the priests shaved their heads and tithes were regularly paid to them. Prayers were recited in Accadian even when this language ceased to be understood by the people. They were all strict Sabbatarians.

This will suffice to illustrate my first remark that many fundamental religious conceptions spread from Mesopotamia. They

are common to men in all parts of the world to-day, they arise largely from the observation of natural phenomena. Prompted by the instinct of natural religion, they were developed and expanded by different tribal temperaments into so-called sects and religions; and yet under new names and a changed environment it is possible to meet to-day in Mesopotamia most of the Babylonian aspects of religious belief, so fundamental were these ancient conceptions.

It has been said that in Mesopotamia there are more sects, more gates to heaven and more roads to hell than in the United States of America. All the divisions and sub-divisions of Islam are represented here, every variety of Jewish belief and unbelief, more than a dozen different Christian sects, all the latest productions of Western thought with the most antiquated forms of Indian philosophy.

Besides the Sufis and Babis from Persia there are the Sabeans and the Yezidees, in whose religious opinions one finds Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Gnosticism, Star Worship, and Ornithomancy, all jumbled together in glorious confusion.

A pilgrimage to any of the sacred shrines is a sure passage to Paradise; none know the Babylonian nether world better than the Yezidees or Devil-worshippers of Nineveh, and the Sabean theology abounds with hells and innumerable demonic rulers.

My second remark is that "One Babylonian family which founded the most remarkable race of the world's history received Divine guidance, so that mankind's fundamental conceptions based upon Natural Religion were clarified and controlled under the influence of what we call Divine revelation."

Bishop Butler has said that "Revelation is a republication of Natural Religion and a supplement to it, and a Revelation to *Mankind* must fall within the grasp of all men or it would fail to be a Revelation." Consequently when we compare the Biblical story of Creation with the Babylonian or other records, we affirm of the former that though, according to many Scientists and Commentators, it cannot conceivably be an absolutely correct account of Creation, yet it is nevertheless as correct an explanation of the origin of the Cosmos as it is possible to place within the grasp of finite man, and that it is apparently more correct than any other attempt that has been made to explain the mystery.

Dr. Driver suggested that the Hebrew and the Babylonian narratives of the Flood evidently have a common origin. In its Hebrew form the story becomes a symbolical embodiment of

ethical and religious truth. A judicial motive is assigned for it ; it becomes a judgment upon corrupt and degenerate mankind and exemplifies a great principle by which God deals with nations and individuals. There is no degrading of the Higher Powers as in the Babylonian story, which attributes the disaster simply to the *caprice* of the gods, but tokens of God's goodwill towards mankind are given, and a gracious declaration of His purposes for the maintenance and welfare of society.

This Hebrew branch of the Babylonian race has been the channel of Divine Revelation as much by its history as by its conceptions of fundamental religious truths.

The history of Israel, said Dr. Westcott, was a continual advance towards the realization of a fellowship of nations. In spite of an exclusive national religion (which they, with all other nations, evolved), they stedfastly maintained a belief in a real unity of the human race. They were the first to introduce the conception of the history of humanity as the history of a common life.

It was in these plains of Mesopotamia that Daniel unfolded the meaning of the two monarchs' visions, explained the organic unity of the powers of the world, and pointed to the kingdom that shall at length embrace all mankind. The Hebrews taught humanity to look upon history *as a life* directed by *will*, and not as catastrophes ruled by destiny or phenomena produced by law, "and this lesson is more legibly written in their history than anywhere else. One catastrophe after another overwhelmed them, they fell beneath each of the great forms of ancient civilization and received from each the choicest treasures it could bestow." Hopes were kindled by periods of triumph or chastened by times of captivity. They came out of Egypt a united nation, though a host of fugitives, and entered Canaan as a conquering army.

In Palestine they were disciplined by a Theocracy, a Monarchy and a Hierarchy ; they returned from their captivity in Babylonia as a small colony which formed the nucleus of a religious commonwealth : their dispersion became so extensive that they became attached to many nations and served in opposing armies, and their faith was influenced by their contact with Greek philosophy and Roman law, yet that Faith could never lose its leading feature—the expectation of a Kingdom that would embrace humanity, the Kingdom of the Messiah. The Messiah came, and the ideals of His Universal Kingdom have been best preserved by the Christian Church, which at the beginning was

a Hebrew Christian Church. The history of its vicissitudes, of its discipline, its triumph and captivity, is not dissimilar to the history of the Jews.

My third remark or suggestion is that "We have apparently reached a very definite advance towards the realization of that Kingdom and fellowship which has been the leading feature of Divine revelation since the first clear call came to the Semitic Sheikh whose earliest religious conceptions were received at Ur of the Chaldees."

I shall only briefly refer you to the phenomena that lead me to make this suggestion. You will be able to supplement the reasons for my hope by your knowledge of what is happening outside the countries with which we are now concerned.

1. The "Unchanging East" is changing at last under the influence of Western trade, laws and civilization. India, China and Japan have changed, but the Mohammedan lands have been the last to yield.

2. For 500 years Islam has held the gates and keys of the Orient, has barred the way to a peaceful settlement of the East, has fostered religious hatred and fanaticism, has either held captive or held in check the greater part of Eastern Christendom, and has caused endless trouble to European peoples.

3. The collapse of Turkey has changed all this. The die is already cast, and no modification of the Treaty of Sevres will alter the fact that the *political* weapon of this great Eastern religion, the so-called "Sword of Islam," has been shattered for ever.

4. As a *religion* Islam remains, and may even continue to flourish, for it has prospered most under British protection; but other influences have been at work and the character of Islam as a religion is also rapidly changing.

5. One of the greatest strongholds of its fanaticism was in Mesopotamia. The recent revolt was engineered at Kerbela and Negif. The revolt had to be crushed, and its suppression has incidentally extinguished the last surviving fires of fanaticism. The religious intolerance of Islam, though not yet entirely eliminated, is now doomed to disappear.

6. The Wahabis of Central Arabia represent a different form of religious bigotry that is less dangerous to civilization than the fanaticism fostered by the Turks. We have rendered essential services to their leader, Ibn Saood, who sent his son to London, where I had the privilege of a few words with him some months

ago. British influence in Central Arabia is of a most salutary character, and the one encouraging feature of the Wahabi reform movement is its principal aim to bring Mohammedanism back to the simplicity of the Koran.

7. Mohammed at the outset of his career regarded Christianity and Judaism as co-ordinate religions. In the 59th verse of the second Sura, we read: "Verily the Moslems, the Jews, the Christians and the Sabeans . . . whosoever believeth in God and the judgment day, and doeth that which is right, shall have their reward with their Lord, they shall have no cause to fear, neither shall they be grieved." Circumstances and the spirit of the times are forcing the leaders of Islam back to *that* standpoint.

8. When the Emir Feisal entered Damascus he uttered memorable words as he stood in the Great Mosque: "Henceforth we will make no difference between Moslem Arabs, Christian Arabs and Jewish Arabs, for every man must respect the rights of others."

9. In a recent interview with Sir H. Samuel in Jerusalem, the Emir Abdullah declared there was no antagonism between the Jewish and the Arab claims in Palestine.

10. It will be quite impossible for the Zionists to impose religious disabilities upon aspirants to administrative posts in Palestine. The very nature of the situation at Jerusalem and the traditions of British administration will in due time compel all extremists, Jewish, Moslem or Christian, to recognize the just claims of others.

11. There are more than 60,000 Jews in Mesopotamia, and large numbers of them have been educated in the well-equipped Alliance schools of Baghdad. Many are being employed to-day by the civil administration of Mesopotamia, and for some years before the war one of the two Baghdad deputies in the Turkish Parliament was a Jew. The educated Jews of Mesopotamia are now either Agnostics or nonconforming Jews of the modern Western type.

12. The resources of Mesopotamia must be developed, and the oil, the cotton and the grain will, of necessity, be brought to the ports of the Mediterranean. (*Vide* correspondence between the United States and British Governments.)

13. The Jews of Mesopotamia and Palestine will be found on the trade routes, they will spread in both directions, and they are mostly Arabic-speaking Jews. There are thousands in Aleppo and many in Mosul.

14. The economic development of these countries will make it impossible for the present artificial divisions to last. Commercial enterprise and engineering schemes will in time open up a waterway from the mouth of the Orontes near Ancient Antioch to the head of the Persian Gulf, and some of the waters of the Upper Euphrates will be continued westward to the mouth of the Orontes.

15. Religious beliefs are stereotyped largely by political conditions and social environment; they are greatly affected by facilities of communication with the outside world and contact with other forms of religious thought.

16. Since the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Eastern Churches have been under bondage to the political dominance of Islam. Now they are free, and as they emerge from their captivity they are hastening to divest their communities of excrescences alien to the Faith and are strengthening the bonds of union in the spirit of that fellowship quietly and consistently emphasized throughout the ages by the still small voice of Divine Revelations.

17. The Assyrian Church was one of the smallest of the Eastern Christian Communities, and one of the most inaccessible, living in the fastnesses of Kurdistan. Driven out by the war, they were sheltered in a refugee camp near Baghdad. Here the children learned English, the young men were enlisted as soldiers and learned the use of modern weapons, while the whole community learned many new things by its contact with the outside world. The new administration in Mesopotamia cannot ignore these sturdy mountaineers, for they acquitted themselves valiantly when fighting under Russian and British officers during the Great War. They will help to police the frontiers and guard the new oilfields.

18. The Moslem Arabs will largely cling to agricultural pursuits, but labour is necessary, as well as security, for developing the resources of a country that holds the key to the world's future, and the Christians, the Jews, the Sabeans and the Yezidees will supply the need. They will no longer be slaves, they will enjoy freedom for the first time in half a millennium under circumstances that will assuredly affect their religious beliefs.

My conclusion is briefly this :—

That Western civilization, its commerce, government, laws, education, science, religion and the upheaval of a great world war, have broken the power of religious fanaticism in the East

and prepared the way for the recognition of complete religious liberty. This is most apparent in Mesopotamia—the last stronghold of fanaticism—where a satisfactory settlement and the safeguarding of the stages already reached will affect the whole of Eastern Christendom, the Jewish question in Palestine and the peace of the Moslem world.

The measure of religious liberty already obtained is producing fellowship, conference, and a friendly criticism where only bitterness and religious hatred existed before. There is therefore a prospect of a League of Religions, with a recognition of that which is fundamental in religious beliefs, and a frank examination of the claims and evidences of Divine Revelation.*

DISCUSSION.

Mr. THEODORE ROBERTS, in moving a vote of thanks to the Chairman, suggested that what we had been hearing about the oil-fields in Mesopotamia might ultimately settle that which had troubled us so much last week, viz., the coal question.

He pointed out that Palestine was geographically the centre of the world, and that the great waterways indicated a design in their arrangement for all nations to traverse them in order to come to Jerusalem for worship, as he believed they would do under the reign of Christ. The Mediterranean Sea would give access to the inhabitants of America, the British Isles and Western Africa, as well as the countries bordering that sea, while the Red Sea appeared almost like a canal made for the purpose of bringing by water the inhabitants of India, China, Malaya, and Australia, as well as Eastern and Southern Africa, to Palestine.

Dr. SCHOFIELD said his first acquaintance with Mesopotamia was through the Report of Sir Wm. Wilcox at a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society, and he was immensely struck with the necessity of some knowledge of that country, with the understanding of the earlier chapters of Genesis.

He also then gave him the first intelligible account of Noah's Deluge that he had heard.

What he would like to ask the Canon was, whether it was true that Babylon had never yet been uninhabited (according to Isaiah),

* The Institute is not responsible for the opinions expressed in the Paper.

and was even now a city of some 10,000 inhabitants, and if he thought it was yet to be rebuilt as a commercial metropolis?

Also whether he thought the eventual port of Mesopotamia would be Tyre, or some port on the littoral of Palestine, as Sir Wm. Wilcox suggested, or Basrah?

Mr. HOSTE asked the lecturer whether he understood him aright to say that it was impossible there should ever be a Jewish State set up again in Palestine?

On the paper being printed, Mr. Hoste supplemented this question with a few further remarks: "We are greatly indebted to Canon Parfit for the brilliant series of lantern views of the Mesopotamia region, with which with bewildering rapidity he illustrated his lecture. I wish I could say the same of some of the 'views' expressed in the lecture itself. Of course we were at a disadvantage in not having the lecture before us in print as usual, and so may have misunderstood the exact terms of some of its contents. I thought if there was one point on which all Biblical students were agreed, it was the re-establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine, though a few years back the very return of the Jews to their own land would have been scouted as a dream. Why should it be taken for granted that such a State should be so intolerant of other faiths, as to exclude, say, capable Moslems, from a share in the administration? Religious liberty and equality of political privilege might well be a condition of the setting up of the said State. Another point: The Canon suggested, I understood, that a certain ruin at Carchemish may quite possibly have been the model of Solomon's temple. This strikes one as a very hazardous conjecture, contradicting as it does the plain statement of Holy Scripture that David gave the pattern to Solomon, 'which the Lord had made him understand in writing by His hand upon him' (1 Chron. xxviii). We never read of David or Solomon even visiting Carchemish, nor is the place once mentioned in the Bible till the reign of Josiah. If the alleged similarity be anything but conjectural, why should not some visitor attracted to Jerusalem by the fame of Solomon have seen the temple in its glory there *and copied it*? As for the 'League of Religions,' it is clear that a Christianity which would join hands on equal terms with Judaism or Mohammedans could not but be one bereft of its essence. I remember a few years back in

Bangalore being taken by a friend to a meeting of reformed Moslems, with whom it was hoped to join hands. As long as the conversation was limited to expatiating on the greatness and goodness of the one God, all went well, but as soon as a Christian present tried to show that it was not unreasonable that a Holy God might have righteous claims against the sinner, which could only be met by the Divine Atonement of Christ, a chill fell over the meeting."

PROFESSOR LANGHORNE ORCHARD writes :—"The Paper is very interesting ; particularly so are the historical, political, and connected religious notes. Paragraph 5, page 179, contains the statement that the Genesis record 'cannot conceivably be an absolutely correct account of Creation.' Yet, as this record is a Revelation from God, it can have no admixture of error. Its truthfulness, avouched by science, is not open to reasonable doubt. Is the word 'correct' really a printer's error, and ought we to read, 'absolutely complete' ? We agree with the author of the Paper that the Biblical Creation-narrative is far superior to the Babylonian or any other account, as 'an embodiment of ethical and religious truth,' and its monotheistic and other features bear testimony to its earlier date."

AUTHOR'S REPLY.

To Dr. Schofield :—The town of Hillah, with about 14,000 inhabitants, is situated on the banks of the Euphrates on the site of Ancient Babylon. It is now becoming a commercial centre of increasing importance. The plans of a great scheme of canals and waterways to run from the mouth of the Orontes to the Persian Gulf, published in the Engineering Supplement to *The Times*, provide for a huge dockyard at Babylon.

The official correspondence with the United States shows that arrangements have already been made to bring oil pipes through the French sphere to the Mediterranean, which undoubtedly means that the most important ports for Mesopotamia will eventually be on the Syria and Palestine littoral.

To Mr. Hoste :—1. I only differ with Mr. Hoste apparently in the meaning of the expression "Jewish State." There are many Hebrew Christians in Palestine as well as many other Christians and Moslems. If, even when the Jews are in the majority, they

are admitted to a share in the administration and enjoy "equality of political privilege," then it would be incorrect to speak of a "Jewish State" in Palestine.

2. I do not believe the ruins at Carchemish served as a model for Solomon's temple. I referred to the resemblance to illustrate my "First Remark."

3. The League of Nations is being established to "prevent war," and in using the expression "League of Religions," my intention is to indicate the possible cessation of religious war. Christian Apologists have no fears for Christianity if only men will come and reason together. Religious intolerance hinders the spread of the Gospel. The main point of my paper is to show the triumphant progress of the one and only Divine Revelation.

To Professor Orchard :—My meaning in paragraph 5, page 179, will be better understood with the added words, "according to many Scientists and Commentators."