

Religious systems of the world



*William Sheowring
Conrad W Thies*

*Introduction and additional note by
Jamna Das Akhtar.*

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PREFACE.

"In proportion as we love truth more and victory less, we shall become anxious to know what it is which leads our opponents to think as they do. We shall begin to suspect that the pertinacity of belief exhibited by them must result from a perception of something we have not perceived. And we shall aim to supplement the portion of truth we have found with the portion found by them."—
HERBERT SPENCER, *First Principles*, part of § 3.

THIS volume is published in response to requests from numerous friends who desired to have, in a permanent form, the Lectures delivered on Sunday Afternoons at South Place Institute, during 1888-89, on "Centres of Spiritual Activity" and "Phases of Religious Development."

These Lectures were first designed to explain and illustrate the different Religious Movements of the day, for though most thinking persons are fully persuaded of their own belief they are often unable to understand the standpoint of others equally earnest, and thus fail to do justice to men of different creeds. After the current divisions of Christianity and Modern Ethical Philosophies had been treated, it was thought that Ancient Religious Systems might also be profitably studied in the same manner, especially as the general public have very little opportunity of becoming acquainted with them, and not unfrequently mistake their mere accidents, or outward observances, for their spirit and substance.

It has not been possible, unfortunately, to reproduce the whole of the Lectures, some having been given *extempore*, and the publication having only been decided upon towards the close of the series.

Some of the lecturers have been so kind as to re-write their

Lectures expressly for this volume, whilst, in the case of one or two, recourse has been had to *The Inquirer* report, for the substance of the Lecture. The article on "The Quaker Reformation" has been specially written for this publication; and thanks are due to Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton for permission to use Canon Rawlinson's Lecture.

Mr. B. F. C. Costelloe wishes it to be understood that he had not the opportunity of revising the final proof sheets of "The Mass;" and that in consequence certain errors have crept in. A note of these will be found in the Appendix, p. 561.

The willingness with which the various lecturers came forward, without fee or reward, to speak on his or her special topic, to audiences not always sympathetic; and in some cases at the risk, almost certainty, of offending their own co-religionists; and the sympathy expressed by several eminent men, who from various causes were unable to take a personal part in the course, have been very encouraging to those who made the arrangements.

It is hoped that the larger reading public to whom this volume is now offered will appreciate as highly as the audiences to whom the Lectures were originally addressed the catholic spirit which devised the scheme, and the ability with which it was carried out.

WILLIAM SHEOWRING,
CONRAD W. THIES,

Introduction

A comprehensive study of different religions were written by eminent scholars, such as, Edward Clodd, George Rawlinson, James Lagge, Samuel Beal, Sir Alfred C. Lyall, Mrs. Frederika Macdonald, Arthur Lillie, Dadabhai Naoroji, John M. Robertson, Oscar Browning and others who can be acclaimed as authorities on the Topics concerned.

In those days people didn't know much about Mithraism and Buddhism and their impact on Christianity. M, Emile Burnouf, however, had the courage to claim that the Indian origin of Christianity was a fact and it could no longer be contradicted. Arthur Lillie who quotes M. Burnouf in his paper entitled "Buddhism In Christianity" analyses this fact in details. He quotes Buddhist and Christian Scriptures and traditions to prove that even some Jewish communities in West Asia and Egypt had adopted some of the Buddhists' rites and beliefs. Asoka, the Great, had sent preachers in Egypt. They spread the message of the Buddha and when merchants from Egypt travelled to Palestine they carried Buddhist rites and beliefs to the Jewish population. These rites and beliefs were adopted by the Jews as if their ancestors were the authors of the same.

John M. Robertson's paper on Mithraism was written at a time when Britanica had devoted only one page on this subject. The author of this paper studied and made valuable researches on the cult of Mithra. In fact, the latter was a deity of the ancient Iranians and the Vedic Aryans of India. The later researches revealed that the people of Luristan in Iran worshipped the deity even in 1200 B.C. The Royal Archives

excavated in Bogazkoi (Turkey) revealed that even in 1450 B.C. Indo-Aryan communities such as the Mitannians worshipped the deity in its original form—Mitra. He, along with three other Gods, was invoked in a written Text of a Treaty of Friendship between a king of the Mitannians and a king of the Hittites. The devastations that brought many great civilizations to an end failed to stop the devotees to worship Mithra. The cult was revived on a very large-scale by the Persian Monarchs from Cyrus to Darius. As Asia-minor and Egypt were parts of the great Persian Empire, the worship of Mithra caught the imagination of millions of religious-minded people in this Empire. Parthian Kings were devotees of the Mithra and they even associated Mithra with their names. Mithradates was the name of several kings of Pontus. They fought against the Roman armies. Roman Emperors were attracted by the militant attributes of the Mithra. They adopted it as a Royal deity. One of these emperors made a proclamation that Mithra was the protector of the Roman empire. Bloody fights between the followers of Mithraism and Christianity form important chapters of the the history of Roman empire, Christianity achieved victory over Mithraism with the result that the devotees of the Mithra were massacred and their temples were destroyed. Recent excavations revealed the existence of temples of Mithra in Italy, France, Britain, Spain, Germany and Greece. Mithraism died but some of its beliefs and rites were adopted by Christianity. Even the celebration of the birth of Mithra was adopted as Christmas. Mr. John Robertson has mentioned the existence of Gnostics in Alexandria and elsewhere in the Northern Egypt. These communities of early Christians were impressed by the teachings of the Buddha and the Vedas. They adopted the Dhyan Yoga along with Samadhi to gain the inner knowledge. A number of religious books of these communities came into light when in December, 1945, an Egyptian peasant Mohammed Ali-al-Samman made an astonishing Archeological Discovery near the Town of Naj Hammadi at Jabal-al-Tarif, a mountain honeycombed with more than 150 caves. He found

a red earthenware jar which contained a number of papyrus books, bound in leather. When western scholars went through these books in the Museum of Coptic Church in Cairo, they were astonished to find that these were the Gnostic Gospels attributed to James (Chrit's brother), Thomas, Mary Magdalene, Philip and others whom these communities regarded as Apostles. These Gospels were not included in the New Testament whose editions organized the Roman Catholic Church and raised the slogan of "One Book And One Church". Bishops of the organised Church condemned Gnostics as heretics. When the adherents of the former came into power, Gnostics were massacred. Their temples and books were burnt. However, we find references to these communities in the critical writings of their opponents. The Naj Hammadi treasure of the Gnostics Gospels, is, therefore, very important and valuable to scholars studying in history of evolution of christianity.

According to the Gospel of Thomas:

,'JESUS said to his disciples, "compare, me to someone and tell me whom I am like."

SIMON PETER said to him, "You are like a righteous angel."

"MATHEW said to him, "You are like a philosopher."

"THOMAS said to him, "Master, my mouth is wholly incapable of saying whom you are like."

"JESUS said, "I am not your Master. Because, you have drunk, you have become drunk from the bubbling stream which I have measured out."

Here Thomas agrees that he cannot be assigned any specific JESUS transcends, at his moment of recognition the relation of student to Master. He becomes himself like the "LIVING JESUS", who declares, "whoever will drink from my mouth will become as I am, and I myself will become that person, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him."

This is a Vedantic belief. Devotion to the teacher and his initiation by making him hear a sound (Shabad) in the state of ecstasy, forms the basis of the Santnat of the

Hindus. Surprisingly, this was also taught by the Master of Gnosticism to their students. The latter were made to sit and close their eyes. They were sure to see the joyful light. A section of eminent scholars of the West acknowledge that this system was derived from Hinduism and Buddhism.

The present work had not touched the Gnostic Gospels because none knew the same about one hundred years ago. However, I have added on this subject Chapters about Buddhism, Christianity and Mithraism are revealing. This is a valuable document for the students of religions.

—JAMNA DAS AKHTAR

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RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS OF THE WORLD

THE COMMON GROUND OF THE RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT.

BY EDWARD CLODD.

A GLANCE at the syllabus of lectures to which the present is designed as introductory, still more at the schedule of sects in *Whitaker's Almanack*, numbering about two hundred and forty—all of whom, the Jews excepted, from "Adventists" to "Wiggan's Evangelistic Mission," profess and call themselves Christians—may remind us of Voltaire's famous taunt that there are thirty religions in England, but only one sauce.

Closer analysis, however, will show that these sects have certain essential elements in common, into which, "for we have this treasure in earthen vessels," other elements have intruded, defiling their purity and obscuring their nature, but giving to each sect its *raison d'être*. Thus it is that the various theological parties have been so anxious to justify their existence, with lamentable waste of effort, in striving to prove one another in the wrong, that the larger question of "things commonly believed among" them has been too often ignored. If the world, especially that vast area of it which is printed in black on the missionary maps, is in such parlous state as the preachers tell us, they might well sink their differences and join their forces against the common enemy of souls.

In looking down the list of lectures¹ thus far announced, we may take credit for sufficient acquaintance with the doctrines and

¹ As the notes of this lecture were not kept, the substance of it has been written from memory with the help of a brief report which appeared in the "Daily Chronicle," January 2nd, 1888.

² This list was afterwards much extended to include lectures on past and present non-Christian religions, and on certain systems of philosophy.

polity of each religious body to assume what the several exponents have to say, and therefore to dis sever fundamentals from accidentals. And it may be no profitless task to seek amidst overlying material for some common principle, to ask whether Newton Hall is or is not entitled to be included, with the Brompton Oratory and Mr. Spurgeon's Tabernacle, in the list of "Centres of Spiritual Activity;" and whether Mr. Frederic Harrison, who, under less favourable circumstances for the healthy discipline of his emotions, might have been a Methodist local preacher or even a captain in the Salvation Army, is not entitled to be classed with Mr. Lilly and Mr. Spurgeon as a spiritually-minded man.

It is clear that that title cannot be granted in common on the ground of the submission of such men to the same authority. The majority of the lecturers will appeal to the Bible. Now, apart from the difficulty that the miscellaneous writings which make up that book are of uncertain authorship and date, and, as the many sects evidence, of disputed and unsettled meaning, the modern Berean is troubled by this further difficulty, that the essence of Revelation lies in its making known what man otherwise could not have known, and that it tells it in language so clear—a kind of Volapük which all of any age and any race may read—that there cannot be two opinions about its meaning. That Bible, Koran, Vedas, Tripitaka, Adi-Granth, or any other sacred literatures fulfil these conditions may be contended by their several official expounders, and may win the assent of the indolently credulous, but to men of sane and lucid soul the assumption is really astounding. And the pity of it is that the genuine and abiding value of these venerable books is obscured by the fictitious value imparted to them, because their priceless worth is in the experience of "men of like passions with ourselves" which they embody, and in the light which they throw on the high-water mark of knowledge reached by the ages in which they were written. *They* are the materialists who thus make these records of man's speculations and strivings "of none effect," under whose hermeneutic scalpel the spirit escapes, and the letter, dead and useless, remains. The Church of Rome offers refuge from the dilemma created by the varying deliverances of the sects by constituting herself the interpreter of Revelation. *Vox Ecclesiæ vox Dei*, and be her major premiss granted the further course of the believer is untroubled. But as her claim rests on the interpretations which she gives to certain passages of Scripture, and on one or two marvellous assumptions behind them, it has no weight with those who reject Revelation. For those who accept it the fact should not be blinked that there is no logical standpoint short of entering her communion. But even the rigidity of which she makes

boast, as the vicegerent of Him "with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning," is a fiction. Like the lesser organizations—all of them direct or indirect seceders from her—she has maintained her hold from time to time by politic concessions, and by ingenious adaptations to new conditions brought about through advance in knowledge. Until our own time no positions of fresh importance have had to be yielded. The abandonment of the statements of Scripture as to the earth's supreme position in the universe, and as to its rapid creation in time, at the demand of astronomy and geology, did not involve the surrender of any fundamental dogma. The Church did not thereby, to quote part of the witty epitaph on Lord Westbury's famous judgment, "deprive the orthodox believer of his sure and certain hope of eternal damnation."

But the demands of palæontology and anthropology are more serious. They have not brought peace, but a sword. No ingenuity of reconcilers, fertile as this has shown itself in resource can harmonize the statement in Genesis, emphasized in the Pauline Epistles, that pain and death came into the world as the punishment of Adam's transgression, with the evidence which the rocks supply as to the existence of strife and death ages before man appeared. No such ingenuity can harmonize the statements in Genesis, as to man's pristine purity and relatively advanced condition, with the teeming evidence furnished by every part of the earth as to his primitive state being one of savagery, from which favourable conditions have enabled a minority to emerge. With this refutation of the theory of the fall of man, the scheme of his Redemption through Jesus Christ, which is the fundamental part of Christian Theology, vanishes into thin air.

"The cusses an' the promerses 'nake one gret chain, an' ef
You snake one link out here, one there, how much on't 'ud be lef'?"

It is this which the Churches have to face; which none of them have yet faced with frankness. Did dogmas and outworn beliefs die because evidence and argument have done their best, this would have died forty years ago, when M. Boucher de Perthes unearthed his flint implements in the Somme valley. But beliefs do not perish thus. They perish under the slow and silent operation of changes to which they fail to adapt themselves. The atmosphere is altered, the organism cannot respond, and therefore it dies. Thus has perished belief in witchcraft, thus is slowly perishing belief in miracles, and, with this, belief in the supernatural generally, as commonly and coarsely defined.

All these changes the age notes with sympathetic eye. For it is not a flippant, but an earnest, age. It has no sympathy with

criticism that is destructive only, or with ridicule or ribaldry as modes of attack on current beliefs. It knows that they have a necessary place in the evolution of ideas, that they are capable of explanation, and traceable from birth to full development by the scientific method which is applied to every historical inquiry. Hence we have the modern science of comparative theology, with its Hibbert Lectures, Gifford Lectures, which are critical, as opposed to Bampton Lectures and Hulse Lectures, which are apologetic. It sees that just as man in a savage or barbarous state made use of like materials for the supply of his bodily needs, so his mental processes are identical, his explanations of phenomena very much the same at corresponding levels of culture. Hence it is that as we find traces of a Stone Age all the world over, so we find traces of fetichism underlying animism, all the world over.

Thus much has been said in endeavour to show that the Bible and other sacred books do not afford the common ground of which we are in search.

Does Theology? defining this as including man's notions about god or gods, and his relations with them, amongst every race, and throughout all time, since man had faculty of thought upon such matters. To trace the history of the evolution of ideas of spiritual beings is to trace the history of man's intellectual development. Primitive theology is primitive science; it is the outcome of man's first efforts to explain the nature of his surroundings, and of the divers influences which affect him for good, and, still more, for ill, as the malignant character of deities amongst lower races shows. His gods have been, still largely are, projections of himself; he details their shape and size, their parts and passions, their daily life, advancing in his conception or presentment of them from crude animism to the higher spiritualism as his own ideas have become loftier and purer. But, hide them as we may, the differences between the gods of the lower and the higher culture from the polytheistic stage to the so-called monotheistic stage are differences of degree and not of kind, the common element in them being the ascription of personality with resulting human qualities. The reproach of old may be addressed to Theist and Tri-theist to-day: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." And with truth says Epicurus: "The impious man is not he who denies the existence of gods like those commonly worshipped; the impious man is he who asserts the gods to be such as the vulgar conceive them."

Well, the more a man considers these things and sees that neither sacred books nor theories of deity afford common ground of agreement, while at the same time he notes what abounding

zeal and earnestness the various religious denominations manifest, the more anxious is he to find some basis of unity between those whose aim is the same—to make men good and unselfish, noble and gentle.

In *what*, then, does the religious sentiment consist? Many definitions of Religion have been attempted, with as little success as attempted definitions of Life. Well that this is so, for that which is capable of analysis has the seeds of dissolution within. Still, some general meaning may be attached to a term which designates what must remain fluent and uncrystallized. Matthew Arnold, in his revolt against anthropomorphism, disentangled religion from all dogma, and defined it as "morality touched by emotion." This is good as far as it goes, and it will be hard to find a better definition, if under the word "emotion" we include that feeling of mystery and reverence which is awakened by perception of our limitations; and the conception of an ideal highest and best, the striving after which quickens man's sense of duty and moves him to action.

Let us then see whether it be feasible or not to find ultimate ground of unity *in reverence deepened, and right conduct made possible, by knowledge.*

Science does not empty the universe of mystery, but only of the pseudo-mysteries which are the product of ages when any conception of orderly relation was impossible. Its main concern is to interpret the facts which man gathers from observation and experience, and to abstain from assertion or denial respecting anything beyond its ken. Since it can throw no light on the genesis of matter or motion; on the beginnings of life, which to it is not one whit less mysterious than the beginnings of the crystal, the ultimate causes which quicken the corpuscles into pulsation being as unknown as those which lock the dead atoms in angular embrace; or on the connection between thought and its accompanying changes in nerve-tissue; it brings us face to face with the deep secret of the universe, before which, if a man feel not awed and silenced, no legends of speaking asses, floating axeheads, and dead restored to life can move him.

"Imagination is, after all, but a poor matter when it has to part company with the Understanding, and even front it hostilely in flat contradiction," says Carlyle; and with such admissions of ignorance on its lips, Science is the more insistent on the necessity of disciplining the imagination which it in no wise seeks to repress. This discipline can be effected by knowledge alone, so that the sum-total of effort to make men better be turned to useful purposes. For so undisciplined are the emotions, so largely are they the sport of intermittent gush or panic, with resulting

bungling in method and haziness in aim, that the misdirection and waste of energy is frightful.

How can it be otherwise when every orthodox worker starts with *a priori* theories of human nature which both research and experience have disproved? He is as an engineer who builds without knowledge or test of the materials which he uses. How can it be otherwise when the churches teach the innate depravity, yet, withal, full responsibility, of man; his powerlessness to do aught that is good, yet, withal, his certain doom if he accept not the conditions as to his eternal bliss which were determined in the Councils of the Trinity before the foundation of the world?

In opposition to this empirical view of the nature of man, Science will have entire revision of what constitutes sin and salvation, and of the basis of morals. It can give no place to codes of ethics which rest solely on the assumption of their supernatural origin, although admitting that such assumptions, by appealing to threats and promises of the gods, did useful work in rude and rough ages. It sees that morals are imperilled when made dependent on doctrines which are liable to be discredited or disproved. It appeals to history and to facts around in proof of the origin of moral codes in man's social needs. For where there is no society there is no sin. Therefore the bases of right and wrong lie in conduct towards one's fellows; the moral sense or conscience is the outcome of social relations, themselves the outcome of the need of living. The common interests which impel to combination involve praise or blame of the acts of each individual in the degree that they aid or hinder the well-being of all—in other words, add to their pleasure or their pain; and this praise and blame constitute the moral code, the collective or *tribal conscience*. Society, like the units of which it is made up, has to fight for its life, and all primitive laws are laws of self-preservation. Tribal self-preservation is based on sympathy between the several members, and it is therefore the ultimate foundation of the moral sense; whatever is helpful to it is *right*, whatever is a hindrance to it is *wrong*. There is, therefore, no fixed standard of right and wrong by which the actions of all men throughout all time are measured. The moral code advances with the progress of the race; conscience is a growth. That which society in rude stages of culture approves, it condemns at later and more refined stages, although such is the power of custom in investing the antique with sanctity, such the persistence of authority, and so deep its interest against change, that moral qualities are often grafted upon acts apart from any question of their bearing upon character.

Sin is, therefore, neglect of duty, or commission of wrong, to our fellow-man. To him who is guilty of it we do not say, "God is