

THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGIONS.

THE books to be noticed in this Chronicle are excellent illustrations of the different lines and types of investigation in the comparative and historical study of religions, and as practically all are influenced by the 'comparative method' of research, it will be convenient to class them under this heading. The first place may be given to the opening instalment of the second edition of Professor Conrad von Orelli's *Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte* (Marcus & Weber, Bonn, 1911). The value of the old edition is well known, and those who have proved its worth will welcome the new one with the additions and improvements that are being introduced. A general handbook of this character is always useful, and the veteran Basel professor has been at pains to make the new edition as thorough as his space allowed. His position is generally conservative, and the plan of the book is descriptive and historical rather than comparative and anthropological. In this respect it stands in striking contrast to the modern distinctively anthropological and psychological tendencies to correlate the resemblances and differences among all peoples, savage or civilized. The book is, therefore, a very useful reminder that the *merely* 'comparative' treatment is only one of several, that all have a methodological importance, and that the strictly historical and geographical (or ethnical) methods of treatment have certain advantages which the others do not possess. In fact, the introductory pages are strong in precisely those features where the ordinary anthropological treatment is weak; they emphasize the relation between the religion and the general culture of an area, and although the more philosophical writers—Robertson Smith among them—have been awake to this, it has often been underestimated or overlooked by those who have been too one-sidedly specialistic. There are, also, useful sections on the relation between the general history of religion and Christian theology, and on the history of the study (pp. 1-29). Prof. von Orelli turns first to the 'Turanian' group. Sixty pages are devoted to China—a brief outline of its history leads up to a survey of the sacred literature, a chronological sketch of the old Chinese religion, accounts of Lao-tse, Kong-fu-tse (Confucius) and later 'masters', and finally, the development of Chinese popular religion down to the present day. Questions of foreign influence are noticed and briefly handled. The first instalment breaks off in a description of the religion of the other Turanian peoples (pp. 89-96). The whole is to be complete at an early date in two volumes.

More specialistic is the first volume of the results achieved by the Mission d'Ollone in China, 1906-1909 (*Recherches sur les Musulmans chinois*: Leroux, Paris, 1911). It is a valuable contribution to the study

of the present position of Islam in China by Commandant d'Ollone, Captain le Page, and Prof. Vissière. The fields dealt with more especially are the provinces of Yun-nan, Sze-Chuen, and Kan-Su. Special memoirs discuss the interesting figure of Seid Ejell Omar and the part he played in the introduction of Mohammedanism. Much light is thrown upon the fusion of Mohammedan with Chinese belief and practice, and some noteworthy examples are given of the syncretism that has always been at work (pp. 8 sqq., 314 sqq.; 401 sq.). A useful account is given of the character of the literature; Sufite influence is visible, and a description of the Persian MSS is contributed by M. E. Blochet. This may be supplemented by M. Vissière's account of the Mohammedan literature printed in China (pp. 389 sqq.). The volume is a happy example of the co-operation of Sinologists and Arabists, and contains much valuable material which could only have been collected and made accessible through such a combination. The concluding chapter is of more general interest. In it it is argued that the prospects of Islam in China in the future depend upon political factors—as was the case in the past. Mohammedanism has already been able to influence the Chinese in such characteristics as the limitation of pork, alcohol, tobacco, and opium; and the day when some Chinaman of Mohammedan religion becomes the head of a province the majority of the population would not be slow to embrace his faith (p. 342). But that this Chinese-Mohammedanism would regard itself as bound politically to the Mohammedanism of other countries is—to judge from these pages—somewhat unlikely.

A new book on the religion of Egypt comes to supplement the earlier classical works of Steindorff, Wiedemann, and Erman. Prof. J. H. Breasted, the author of *The Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1912), is well known for his fine *History of Egypt* (1906) and the series of *Historical Records* (1906-1907). The distinctive feature of the book is the place given to the 'Pyramid Texts', a very important series of texts, older than the ever-popular 'Book of the Dead', and certainly the oldest body of literature surviving from the ancient world. They 'disclose to us the earliest chapter in the intellectual history of man as preserved to modern times . . . they are to the study of Egyptian language and civilization what the Vedas have been in the study of early East Indian and Aryan culture'. The standard edition of these texts is quite recent and this book gives the first adequate account in English. Dating from about 2500 B.C., though representing the thought of an earlier period, they afford a good starting-point for the discussion of the religion of Egypt and its development. In addition to a valuable description and survey of the religion as revealed by these texts, the author deals in a very

interesting manner with the main vicissitudes in the course of centuries. Thus one may note, in particular, the well-written chapter on the emergence both of the moral sense and of scepticism at the period of the serious internal troubles of the nineteenth century B.C. Here we have the famous picture of the ideal king, the 'Messianic' character of which is upheld against the criticisms of Mr Alan Gardiner (pp. 212 sqq.). The fascination of the study of the vicissitudes of an area during nearly 3,000 years of history is excellently communicated by Prof. Breasted as he traces them with the help of the recent discoveries, and he emphasizes in particular 'the truth that the process of religion-making has never ceased, and that the same forces which shaped religion in ancient Egypt are still operative in our own midst and continue to mould our own religion to-day'. Here may be appended a reference to a careful investigation of the religious significance of the monarchy in Egypt by a Dutch scholar, Dr G. J. Thierry (*De Religieuze Beteekenis van het Aegyptische Koningschap*: Brill, Leiden, 1913). It is now well known that the Egyptian pharaohs were regarded as semi-divine, if not divine, and this belief was primarily no isolated or conventional one, but involved a large body of beliefs and customs which substantiate and supplement it. In the first instalment (140 pages) Dr Thierry deals with the titles of the Egyptian kings and discusses the evidence in the light of the comparative method. The continuation of this useful piece of research will be awaited with interest.

The 'American Lectures on the History of Religions' have been the means of producing a fine series of special studies, inaugurated in 1894 by Prof. Rhys Davids in his account of Buddhism. The latest, the ninth, is due to Prof. Morris Jastrow, Junior, of Philadelphia: *Aspects of Religious Belief and Practice in Babylonia and Assyria* (Putnam's, New York and London, 1911). The large volume of nearly 500 pages contains a map, 54 illustrations (with full descriptions), and elaborate chronological lists. Here again we have one of the foremost authorities on the subject. An immense amount of material is deftly and lightly handled by the author in his usual eloquent and lucid manner. The treatment is descriptive and the whole falls into six divisions: (1) culture and religion, (2) the Pantheon, (3) divination, (4) astrology, (5) the temples and their cults, and (6) ethics and the life after death. Prof. Jastrow has a keen sense of the significance of the historical development of a religion and endeavours throughout to distinguish between the popular religion and the somewhat artificial form given to it in the official cult. He observes: 'I am convinced that for a proper understanding of the religion under discussion, we must differentiate more sharply than has hitherto been done between these two currents of thought—the popular and the speculative.' Out of an abundance of

valuable pages it is difficult to select any for special mention, but it may be mentioned that perhaps the most notable contribution is the discussion of 'hepatoscopy', an ancient form of divination, the study of which Prof. Jastrow has made his own. Together with astrology—which, too, is most learnedly and clearly handled—both are ancient investigations of a rudimentary character which have a value of their own for early anatomy and astronomy, and are early examples of 'science' before science was studied for its own sake.

Of a more special character are the firstfruits of the 'Wilde Lecture-ship' at Oxford in which Dr Farnell gives a comparative sketch of Mesopotamian, Anatolian, and Hellenic religions, under the title *Greece and Babylon* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1911). The particular problem he takes up is the indebtedness, if any, of Greece to Babylon. Within recent years a strong and by no means unassuming school of Orientalists has been insisting upon the very thorough indebtedness of Greece and other lands to the proud and ancient culture of Babylonia and Assyria. Others, however, have recognized that this indebtedness was exaggerated, and that the claims of 'Pan-Babylonism' went beyond the evidence. It is exceedingly appropriate, therefore, that the question should have been investigated from the Greek side, and that of all scholars Dr Farnell should be the one to handle it. The work has involved a close study of the Oriental material, and here the author has made a careful choice, very little of real importance having been overlooked. He discusses the relations between Greece, Asia Minor, and the Babylonian area, partly as regards the broad features—anthropomorphism, temperament, morality, divine power; and partly with attention to special points—goddesses, nature-powers, eschatology. As was only to be expected, he finds some fundamental differences which outweigh the features in which there are resemblances. In handling the evidence he pays necessary attention to the historical background, pointing out, for example, the influence of the Hittite area as a barrier and as a means of communication between the coastlands of Asia Minor and the Babylonian power. Especially instructive are his remarks on methodology, on anthropomorphism, and on the relation between theriomorphism and mysticism. All in all, the volume is most informing and stimulating, and in many respects it is of more value for the systematic study of religions than its title would suggest.

Miss Jane Harrison, in *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of the Greek Religion* (University Press, Cambridge, 1912), though dealing primarily with Greece, Greek ritual, and Greek ideas, covers a vast range of topics in which the influence of recent psychology, philosophy, and sociology is unmistakable. The book is highly suggestive and arresting as a general contribution to the psychological and anthropological study

of religions ; but one misses a careful and comprehensive treatment of those features which its author considers most potent for the origin and growth of religion. A more sympathetic and more critical acquaintance with psychology and philosophy would—one feels—have a serious effect upon her brilliant and characteristic argumentation : at least it would have suggested that, if any of our ideas resemble those found among totemists, it is hardly because our remote ancestors ‘once thought and lived totemistically’ (p. 534). The whole subject of our psychical indebtedness to prehistoric forefathers needs reconsideration. Miss Harrison brings out many valuable parallels, and hardly a page is devoid of fruitful suggestion ; but the book is written from a point of view which is not sufficiently objective to assist the student, and in certain places may wound the ordinary reader who has a religious position of his own. Especially noteworthy is the light thrown upon pre-anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic forms of thought, and upon all that savours of the ‘mystical’. This feature, and the admitted indebtedness to M. Bergson (*Preface* p. viii), make it not unnecessary to recall the warning of Plotinus, ‘to seek to rise above intelligence is to fall outside it’. No one who reads this—in many respects—striking contribution to the study of religion will escape the feeling that it is as material for that study as any of the Greek or totemistic data which it discusses.

Yet another example of Dr J. G. Frazer’s untiring zeal and ceaseless energy is furnished by the first volume of the Gifford Lectures at St Andrews (1911–1912) : *The Belief in Immortality and the Worship of the Dead* (Macmillan, London, 1913). His aim has been to relate the evidence—which he does with his accustomed picturesqueness and eloquence—and to set before his readers the results of his indefatigable labours, in so far as this subject is concerned. The present volume deals with the belief as it is found among the aborigines of Australia, the Torres Straits islands, New Guinea, and Melanesia ; and, needless to say, no future worker at this subject can afford to neglect the vast mine of information here presented in so convenient and readable a form. Dr Frazer explicitly states that his lectures ‘are intended to serve simply as a document of religious history ; they make no pretence to discuss philosophically the truth of the beliefs and the morality of the practices which will be passed under review’ (p. 30). None the less, although it may be the task of descriptive anthropology to record observations without any admixture of theory (p. 230 sq.), it is exceedingly difficult to avoid disclosing an attitude which is that of the ‘philosophe sans le savoir’. In reading this invaluable book one’s sense of profound indebtedness to the author is tinged with a real regret at his melancholy conception of humanity. It is surely much safer to suppose that the savage is a little wiser than we imagine (cf. p. 265) than with deft

phrase and apt wording to give impressions that virtually beg important questions. Two opposite views—extremely opposite ones—are given in conclusion (pp. 469 sqq., cf. p. viii). Neither is in the slightest degree flattering to humanity or courteous to those who hold a religious position, and it would be difficult to find a more curious example of the dilemma in which, it is conceived, we are placed. On the one side we have the loftiest view of human nature with an overdrawn picture of the soaring mind, while on the other is a picture so pessimistic, so black, that all men except those who are fortunate enough to be ‘rational’ could doubtless be convicted of religious ideas ‘unworthy the serious attention of a rational mind’ (p. 471). Although, as he admits, the ‘drivellings’ (of the savages, let me add) do not of course refute the belief in immortality, it is difficult to see why ‘they are at least fitted to invest its high-flown pretensions with an air of ludicrous absurdity’. This is either mere rhetoric, and, like all eloquent rhetoric—whether anthropological or otherwise—need not be taken seriously, or it is a piece of hasty writing which reads strangely from the pen of the author of *Psyche's Task*. But, as Dr Frazer would be the first to admit, anthropology is beset with pitfalls, fundamental questions in the comparative study of religion still await a definite answer, and the presentation of evidence is of more value than the particular theories held by either writer or reader.

In the fourth volume of his *Cultes, Mythes et Religions* (Leroux, Paris, 1912), M. Salomon Reinach gives further proof of his versatility in twenty-eight studies and articles. The opening one is an expansion of a lecture given at Cambridge in 1911 and published in the *Quarterly Review*. It is an instructive sketch of the history of what he calls ‘l'exégèse mythologique’, and it is interesting as illustrating the different tendencies among those who devote themselves to the comparative study of religions. Indeed it may safely be said that no single writer can be regarded as an authoritative indication of the present position of the study, and that the study is as much in a stage of transition as, for example, the criticism of the Old Testament. One must admire M. Reinach's range of learning. Some of his subjects are classical: Marsyas, Phaethon, the tomb of Ovid, divination at Rome. A number are biblical: e. g. a rather speculative but no less interesting discussion of the story of Samson. In another he argues that the reference in Luke xxii 38 is to the two swords of Judges vii 21 (‘the sword of the Lord and of Gideon’)—if this be at all plausible there must be a misunderstanding, as the words of Gideon are more naturally taken as an old war-cry; cf. e. g. Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage*, p. 44 sq. Some, again, are historical—on Gilles de Rais, and on Jean d'Arc according to Anatole France and Andrew Lang. Questions of

more technical interest are handled in chapters on the influence of images on the formation of myths, on ritual laughter (a novel and curious investigation), and on the son-in-law and the mother-in-law. The title of the concluding chapter 'de Bello Orphico' will sufficiently explain itself to readers of his 'Orpheus'; M. Reinach is a keen controversialist and does his best to clear the issue. There are numerous illustrations and an index to this and the preceding volumes.

Prof. Frédéric Bouvier, S.J., in *Recherches de Science Religieuse* (Turpin, Paris, 1912-1913), undertakes two enquiries, 'Magie : à la Recherche d'une Définition' (1912, no. 5), and 'Religion et Magie' (1913, no. 2). The two pamphlets are concise and critical discussions of the present position in the study of religions and help to clear the air and remove some of the obscurities that have grown up. If it is difficult to follow the writer throughout, it is none the less important to have his standpoint represented, since in the nature of the case the best standpoint will be one that at least does justice to its rivals. It is therefore timely to have this insistence upon the diversity of the phenomena that are now loosely collected under the term 'Magic'. There is that which the modern enquirer calls Magic, and there is that which was feared and abominated as magic by peoples all the world over; and to confuse these is to render enquiry unnecessarily complicated. What Magic really means depends properly upon our conceptions of Religion and of Mind, and most modern enquiries run the risk of begging the very questions at issue. These two pamphlets are a useful reminder that the fundamentals of the study of religions are still uncertain and that the methodology of this field of research is still in the making.

The volume on *Comparative Religion* in the 'Cambridge Manuals' (Cambridge, 1913) has been entrusted to Principal Jevons of Durham, whose study on *The Idea of God in Early Religions* (1910) belongs to the same series and is now supplemented. The two books form a very sound and valuable introduction to the subject, treating clearly and carefully different aspects of it, and giving the reader an excellent survey of the more important subdivisions and lines of enquiry. As in his *Introduction to the Study of Comparative Religion* (1908) his point of view is explicitly Christian, and his books may be welcomed as a proof that the critical study of religions is not incompatible with Christianity. On the other hand, it is easy to feel that too great a distinction is drawn between this and earlier or other faiths, and that the arguments are influenced by particular conceptions of the evolution (1) of peoples and (2) of thought in general. Hence, now and then the book reads like a piece of apologetics, contrasting Christian ideals and aims with the stumbling practices outside Christianity. All three books can be thoroughly recommended to serious students.

Mr J. B. Hannay's *Christianity: The Sources of its Teaching and Symbolism* (Griffiths, London, 1913) is a volume of nearly 400 pages with some 127 figures and illustrations, and is devoted to a comparison of the external features of Christianity with those of other religions. There is great wealth of detail, the author has read widely and promiscuously, and, as it would seem, in order to justify a particular theory. The second chapter is entitled 'The Phallic Cult—the Universal Religion', and is quite enough to indicate the groundwork of the book. Both here and elsewhere the more valuable portions of his book are quite spoilt by horrible philological atrocities, the worst that I have ever come across,—e.g. Palestine is Phallus-stan, the land of the worship of the phallus!! The work is disheartening, and the exaggerated argumentation of an unscientific and sexual character is offensive, intellectually, to any one seriously interested in religions. Because with the help of a large vocabulary of symbols a sexual or coarse interpretation can be found in any piece of evidence, it does not follow that that interpretation is either correct or even the only one. It is very surprising that a preposterous book of this sort should ever have been published, or at least that some care was not taken to remove its blemishes and absurdities.

Christianity and other Faiths: An Essay in Comparative Religion, by Dr W. St Clair Tisdall (Scott, London, 1912), belongs to the 'Library of Historic Theology' and is a useful comparison of the best features in Christianity with other religions generally. It has many valuable points, but it is less objective than the works of Jevons or Macculloch's handy little *Comparative Theology*. There are many students who are unacquainted with the comparative method and who view it with a certain suspicion; these will find this book a useful introduction; moreover, books of this kind, of an explicitly apologetic character, will doubtless always be needed. The writer maintains a somewhat conservative type of Christianity; he clearly perceives that there is some recognition of the Divine outside Christian influence, but seems to me to be too ready to see the undesirable aspects of other faiths. From a purely methodological point of view this is unfortunate; and indeed it brings serious difficulties from a doctrinal standpoint, since any evaluation of 'heathen' religions whether of the past or of the present day involves conceptions of the Deity's relations to others as well as to ourselves. Even the mildest type of comparative treatment, as illustrated by this book, raises serious questions of a theological and philosophical character, and it is assuredly necessary to co-ordinate one's ideas of a progressiveness in revelation with the varying levels of religious thought throughout the modern world.

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