

view of those who recognize a distinction of a Divine and a human element in Christ's self-consciousness, and so far qualify his own rather unguarded utterance: "There is nothing to prevent us from speaking of this human life of His just as we would speak of one of ourselves?" The difficulty is, on Dr. Sanday's view in which he "shakes hands" with those Continental theologians who see humanity in Christ and nothing else, to prevent his conception from passing over into that simply of a God-filled man, in whom an energetic, subliminal consciousness takes the place of Deity.



The Myth and the Word.

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THE study of mythology is by no means the fruitless thing that many suppose. The latest results in the shape of comparative mythology warrant the conviction that still greater things are awaiting those who make this study their own.

Doubtless the nature of the subject lends itself, more than most, to speculations that are more mythological than the myths they pretend to interpret, while the indelicacy of many of the myths themselves serves to repel men from a study which seems to reek only with rotteness. And yet, as the scientific study of mythology develops, the greater seems the certainty that certain critical theories must yield to the dominance of wider research and historical evidence.

For the linguist, the historian, the philosopher, the artist, the poet, the man of letters, and the theologian, the study of mythology may be said to be unavoidable.

For each of them it has its own message. The significance of the message will vary, of course, with the object of each thinker, but in every case its value becomes increasingly obvious. History seeks origins; language, universal archaic speech;

philosophy, the reason of things ; art, the simplicity of form ; poetry, nature ; literature, man's earliest efforts to express his highest thoughts ; and theology, man's pristine religious ideas and beliefs ; and all of these, in their measure, are to be found in polytheistic mythologies.

That theologians should often have been prejudiced against mythological studies can be readily understood, if not condoned. But that they should have frequently failed to grasp its importance is to be regretted. Still more is it to be regretted that the use of mythological lore should have been left very much to scholars of the destructive school, who have applied it in such a way as to give fictitious value to theories and speculations otherwise worthless.

The Conservative theologian, who neglects to acquaint himself at least with the fields covered by mythology, deprives himself of a really valuable weapon in defence of the purity, integrity, and inspiration of the Bible, for, the more we plumb the depths of the myth historical, the myth philosophical, the myth theological, the more do we see that to trace any of them in the Word of God is an impossible undertaking for any man or any school whose reputation for scholarship is worth conserving. For what is a myth? According to our foremost scholars, it is "a pure fiction, without any basis of fact." This at once marks it off from legend, allegory, or parable, all of which may have a substratum of fact. Nay, more, it puts, of necessity, a severe limitation upon the use of the word in relation to Biblical subjects. Retreat into the realm of mythology on the part of advanced Bible critics in order to escape supposed difficulties, or bolster up courageous assumptions and speculations, is a hopeless move in view of this definition. "Fiction without any basis of fact" is surely poor ground for even a "higher critic" to stand upon.

Indeed, it is not ground at all, but a morass that grows more treacherous the longer we traverse it, and, if history means anything, finally engulfs those who trust it. It is, in Biblical speech, "a refuge of lies."

The question is sometimes put, "How comes it that the great civilizations and religions of ancient times all succumbed, one after another, to the touch of decay, and vanished into oblivion?" Historical data can be adduced in favour of the answer that the myth lies at the bottom of it all. Had mythology concerned itself with, or sprung out of, a nation's desire merely for amusement, or self-glorification, or even literary expression as such and of its kind, it would not have been needful to assign it any vital place in the rôle of human history. But when we find it creating vast polytheistic creeds, and, through them, shaping polytheistic religions and polytheistic ethics, we can readily understand its bearing upon national progress or decay, or both.

That a myth can be "a pure fiction," and yet operate on the minds and consciences of men, both by way of moral constraint and restraint, needs no proof. Even the holiest and wisest of men have been betrayed into ethical action by the grossest myths. The mouldy bread and clouted shoes of the men of Gibeon were an acted myth, but the action of Joshua there anent was only too plainly an ethical reality. That is to say, a glaring lie moved him into ethical action and bound him in conscience to a position from which he could not resile. Think of the discussions of statesmen, satirists, poets, philosophers, in the days of mythological decadence in Greece and Rome, and we need no further demonstration of the power of mythology in shaping the social, civic, religious, commercial, and national life of polytheistic peoples. From these we see how patriotism had kindled its fires at mythic altars; national games had found their sanctions in the honours due to mythic deities; law and order based themselves on mythic cosmogonies; commercial integrity had been maintained by mythic maxims; and great religions, with all their paraphernalia of rite and ceremony, and their intrusion into the private and public relations of the people, secured at least outward respect and obedience on the ground of mythic supernaturalism. Up to a point, therefore, mythology was a force to be reckoned with in the history of

these nations. But the famous dictum of Gibbon concerning the religions of the Roman Empire in its palmy days gives us the clue to the decadence that followed: "The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher as equally false; and by the magistrate as equally useful."¹

That is to say, the superstitions of mythology ruled the ignorant multitudes; scepticism made the myths a laughing-stock to the learned; and utilitarianism made the myths valuable to the magistrates in restraining the mob.

It is a strange mixture, but ominous—superstition, scepticism, sham. It was in vain that the best scholarship attempted to find a rational way out from the myth to the allegory, and so to save the nation from the transparent falsities and contradictions of the mythologies that were fast growing into an intolerable mass of monstrosities and impurities.

The mythical bestialities of the gods found their outcome only too surely in the atrocious and growing immorality of the people. No sin could be named that has not its counterpart, and therefore sanction, among the mythological deities. Sodomy, adultery, fornication, lying, murder, theft, perjury, treachery, were all justified by the example of the mythic gods. It needed only that comedy should at last set the people laughing at their own deities, while still imitating their immoralities, to bring about the decadence that ended in oblivion.

No permanent civilization, and certainly no permanent religion, can be built upon lies. The lie may attract and hold the human mind for a time, but the moment of its discovery is also the moment of its doom, for if there be no road out of the lie into the truth, the reaction ends only in self-destruction and ruin. Modern instances of this can be seen in lands where the renouncing of heathen superstitions, when unaccompanied by entrance into the better light of the Gospel, has ended only in the wild reactions of anarchism, despair,

¹ "Roman Empire," cap. ii., § 1.

and suicide. As Dean Church, speaking of the Roman religious decline, so well says: "It (the religion) went, and there was nothing to supply its place but a philosophy, often very noble and true in its language, able, I doubt not, in evil days to elevate and comfort, and often purify its better disciples, but unable to overawe, to heal, to charm a diseased society; which never could breathe life and energy into words for the people; which wanted that voice of power that could quicken the dead letter, and command attention, where the destinies of the world were decided. I know nothing more strange and sorrowful in Roman history than to observe the absolute impotence of what must have been popular conscience on the crimes of statesmen and the bestial infamy of Emperors. There were plenty of men to revile them; there were men to brand them in immortal epigrams; there were men to kill them. But there was no man to make his voice heard and be respected, about righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come."¹

Just so. The myth contains within itself the principle of its own destruction; and not even civilizations so magnificent as those of Assyria, Egypt, Greece, and Rome could withstand the subtle influence it exerted in finally subverting national life, and perverting the noblest instincts of the human soul. The myth, being a perversion of the pure symbolism of Nature, could have no other development than it had. It must needs graduate downwards from perverted symbolism into polytheism, idolatry, image-worship, fetishism, pantheism, and finally nihilism; and thus it is the distinctive mark of heathenism. It *is* heathenism. It can be nothing else, even in its earliest and more innocent forms. The puzzle is how any man claiming to be an interpreter of the Bible should fail to see this. To read into the Scriptures mythical allusions, where no historical proof of such allusions is offered, nor indeed possible, may serve the purpose of reducing revelation to the level of paganism, but it can never make clear the stupendous difference between the inspired writings and those of the heathen. The truth is that

¹ "Gifts of Civilization," pp. 148, 149.

the modern craze for detecting myths in the Bible is fast running to seed. It may or may not be a proof of wide mythological knowledge, but it is no proof whatever of a true insight into the Word of God, or of special fitness for interpreting a language which, while often highly poetic and figurative, is never unreal, fictitious, or unhistorical.

It needs only a genuine acquaintance with mythology to end for ever the delusion that any place can be found in the Bible for the myth. The truth cannot masquerade in the fancy dresses of the falsehood. Monotheism cannot maintain its protest in favour of the "one living and true God" by polytheistic forms or formulæ. Inspired revelation can borrow neither form nor substance from uninspired fictions. The concrete faith of the Hebrew and the Christian—one in essence, and with the life behind it that persists and abides for ever, historically and spiritually—dare not, and cannot, identify itself with that which has neither life nor permanency here nor the hope of the hereafter. Really great Biblical scholarship cannot become a possibility as long as we are taught that myth and history are mingled in Scripture, and that we must spend our strength in the vain attempt to disentangle the fact from the fiction, the real from the unreal, the truth from the imposture, or in the still more hopeless task of interpreting the one by the other.

As a modern writer puts it: "We are losing the sense of truth because we treat as poetical exaggeration or figurative language the oath which God swore to His people by His prophets. And thus we have forfeited all interest in, and comprehension of, His dealings with nations and His plan of human history—of prophecy in general, and the great inspiring hope of the supremely glorious and real accomplishment of His promises. Two-thirds of the Word of God lie fallow; we know not what to make of them. Hence, too, it comes that we chatter about a "sinister Hebrew God of vengeance, or ask with infantile ineptitude how it can affect our Christian faith whether Abraham ever lived or not."¹

¹ Bettex, "Modern Science and Christianity," pp. 199, 200.

What, for instance, are we to make of statements such as the following by "higher critics"? "Fire and Moloch worship was the ancestral, legal, and orthodox worship of the nation of Israel." Again: "Moses never forbade human sacrifices. On the contrary, these constituted a legal and essential part of the State worship from earliest times down to the destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah." Or again: "Originally Jahveh was a god of light or of the sun, and the heat of the sun and the consuming fire were considered to proceed from Him, and to be ruled by Him. In accordance with this, Jahveh was conceived by those who worshipped Him to be a severe being, inaccessible to mankind, whom it was necessary to propitiate with sacrifices and offerings, and even with human sacrifices." Apart altogether from questions of poetry, metaphor, symbolism, history, and exegesis, we ask ourselves the question, What do these writers suppose they have gained by this attempted association, if not identification, of Jahveh with Moloch? Have they made the Bible more intelligible, more reliable, more authoritative, more spiritual? Or have they made the myth more credible or attractive? Neither the one nor the other.

To trace, for instance, the seraphim of Isaiah to the serpent-myths of extra-Biblical traditions, or to affirm that the personification of Sheol and Death is mythological, may seem conclusive to pedantic minds; but if mythology, as we have seen, has no basis in fact, the attempt to explain the fact by fiction, or to deal with the awful verities of the Unseen and Death on mythological grounds, is neither sound learning nor common sense. Personification of the real is an intelligible and often impressive figure of speech. But to drag in mythology by way of justifying such figurative speech is to make the thing that is not explain the thing that is; it is to exalt the false above the true, and expose Biblical interpretation to something worse than contempt. "O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?" is personification. "What ailed thee, O Sea, that thou fleddest: thou, Jordan, that thou turnedst

back?" is personification. So is the statement: "Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night teacheth knowledge"; but surely the myths of heathenism need not be ransacked to cast light upon language manifestly dramatic, and used with the one purpose of making the idea at once memorable and impressive.

The one test of these numerous and subtle references in certain commentaries to mythological data is to demand their historical evidence.

When reference after reference of this kind is met, the tendency on the part of untrained readers is to accept them as a proof that the writers of Scripture held these myths for truth, and were willing to avail themselves of their help in recording what only the Spirit of God revealed. The longer we study the Divine record, the more we see that its teaching is coherent, reasonable, and befitting man's need and God's purpose. The more we know of mythology, we see that between it and this revelation there is a great gulf fixed. In the one we are in the realm of reality, purity, light, and hope. In the other we are surrounded with the unreal, the impossible, the false, and the foul, and we decline to have them allied, or to believe that the eternal light needs to be gilded by the glimmerings of myths begotten of the night, and not of the day.



A Plea for the Y.M.C.A.

By CHARLES T. BATEMAN.

ONE of the numerous class of weekly journals depending for its circulation upon sensational articles recently announced on its contents bill, "Exposure of the Y.M.C.A." I bought the paper and read the "Exposure," only to find a rehash of the ancient criticisms against this organization, all of which have been answered by Time or refuted by those com-