

Possible Zoroastrian Influences on the Religion of Israel.

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PART II.

READING the other day the prospectus of a new theological review, which undertook to satisfy the claims alike of practical and of scientific theology, and to bring the ordinary reader into contact with university professors in their studies, I was startled to find the editor expressing his complete indifference to one of those subjects which some biblical professors most affect—the comparative history of religions. No doubt this old school theologian would regard my present thesis as fanciful in the extreme, and would remonstrate with me for seeking to divert the theological students of Oxford from more useful pursuits. I trust, however, that those who followed my first lecture will not be led astray by the narrow views of which this editor is the mouthpiece, and which are still too common in England. There are few more important studies for the theologian of to-day than that of the great religions, not only for the reasons which Professor Max Müller and others have again and again so ably urged, but because, until we know the facts respecting these religions and their relation to the religion or religions of the Bible, we cannot formulate a defensible doctrine of revelation, and it is surely such a doctrine the want of which is in ever-widening circles most painfully felt. Of course, too, this study has an important bearing on some of the most interesting questions of biblical criticism and exegesis. Undeterred, therefore, by the probable imputation of fancifulness (which merely means a willingness to encounter difficult problems), I resume the subject at the point which I had reached in my first lecture.

I attempted, as you will remember, to show that there is a strong affinity between the religion of Ahura Mazda and that of Jehovah (Yahveh), and that being brought into contact with the Persians, the Jews, alike in Palestine and elsewhere,¹ could not remain wholly uninfluenced by Persian religion. This presumption is verified by facts in the case of angelology and dualism; is it not likely to be also verified in the case of the Jewish doctrine of the "last things"? Resurrection and the higher immortality are two of the most striking features of the Zoroastrian faith; is it not reasonable to hold that any traces of these beliefs in the later religious books and systems of Palestine must be partly

¹ Iranian influence was not and could not be confined to the Iranian lands. Zoroastrian ideas were (as I observed in Lecture I.) in the air, and circulated freely throughout the empire. This was facilitated, so far as Israel was concerned, by the constant intercourse which existed between the Jews of Persia and Mesopotamia and those of Palestine. Cf. the quotation from Grätz, p. 256, note.

accounted for by Persian influence? It was shown in the first lecture that in certain leading expressions of Jewish belief—Essenism, the Book of Enoch, and (though this was but touched upon) the New Testament—Zoroastrian influence on their view of a future life could with much probability be indicated. To-day we must cross the border into the Old Testament, and inquire whether the later books, or parts of books, do not contain passages which express to some extent a Zoroastrian view of the "last things." The inquiry is, I know, a difficult one. Partly because, at any rate in the Psalms, the language is vague and admits different interpretations; partly, too, from the keen controversy of which the dates of many of the Hebrew books are the subject. The vagueness of the expressions does, indeed, preclude any peremptory and dogmatic assertion as to the religious belief of the writer; but I maintain that when the date of the work in which they occur is fixed on independent critical grounds in the late Persian period, we are justified in selecting out of two equally possible interpretations that which involves supposing Zoroastrian influence. You will not, I hope, misunderstand me. I maintain the essential originality of the higher Jewish religion equally with Dean Church in his fine eulogium of the Psalms.² I think that germs of Zoroastrianising beliefs existed in Israel before its religion was brought face to face with Mazdeism, and that, when this critical event took place, the presence within the Church-nation of a principle, called by a prophet of the late Persian age "the spirit of holiness" (Isa. lxiii. 10, 11), hindered the adoption of any manifestly dangerous Persian belief.

The inquiry which I opened in my eighth Bampton Lecture in 1889, and which I reopen to-day, is practically a new one. Twenty years ago it would have been impossible. By asking whether some of the Hebrew Scriptures do not express or imply ideas closely akin to Christian ones, I should have appeared to convict myself of critical incapacity. The reason simply is, that the criticism of the majority had erected certain conclusions of its own into dogmas, and had not faced the possibility that a large part of the Old Testament might be of post-Exilic origin. The Book of Job, for instance, was placed in the period of Isaiah, or between Isaiah and Jeremiah; of the Psalms some were Davidic, many, at any rate, pre-Exilic; of few could it be said with much confidence that they belonged to the period verging on the Greek domination; while as to Isaiah, the

² See *The Sacred Poetry of Early Religions* (1874).

last twenty-seven chapters belonged, as a whole, to the close of the Babylonian Exile. This moderate conservatism was not without a temporary justification; it enforced greater circumspection alike on the advanced critics and on Christian apologists. It has, however, ceased to be undeniably predominant among critics, and we may venture to take this as a sign that the need of it is passing away. A criticism which is not indeed entirely new, but which may seem so, because it has hitherto been unfashionable, and which has certainly learned while in disgrace to know its own mind better and to strengthen its defences, has come, or is coming, to the front. Its claim is, not to have settled everything, but to have offered solutions of some biblical problems which may be modified and expanded, but cannot be altogether overthrown. Now the acceptance of those solutions has a direct and important bearing on exegesis. It at once gives historical probability to interpretations which twenty years ago seemed irreconcilable with the chronological position of certain books. If, for instance, the Psalms be, with few if any exceptions, written in the post-Exile period, it is no longer anachronistic to assume in some of the psalmists a large development of religious thought, stimulated in no slight degree by the kindred Persian religion. I do not mean that we are perfectly free to assert, as the old interpreters asserted, the presence of late ideas whenever it may for any reason be convenient. We are only entitled to admit them when, besides being favoured by criticism, they help instead of hindering the connection of thought. For instance, even if Job should turn out to be most probably a post-Exilic work (this question requires a re-examination), we must not admit a reference to the Resurrection, or even to the "beatific vision" alone, in Job xix. 26, 27, because (apart from the difficulty and probable corruption of the text) such a reference would be altogether inconsistent with the connection. But there are, at any rate, some passages in the later Hebrew Scriptures where this is not the case, and where what I may call a Zoroastrianising interpretation is in harmony with the context, and adds fulness and richness to the meaning. May I add that there is one more limitation which I should like to impose on those who may apply this theory to the Psalms? These poems were, with very few exceptions, intended for liturgical use. It seems to me reasonable to suppose that the writers both anticipated and sanctioned diverse interpretations of certain expressions. It was long before such ideas as the resurrection and the higher immortality became a part of the popular orthodoxy. The psalmists could not have desired to exclude all who were not as advanced as themselves from the use of their works. Not merely because they were Eastern poets, but in obedience

probably to the law of charity, they used vague expressions which needed to be explained mentally from the stock of ideas which the worshippers brought with them. To those whose religious position was the comparatively dry and meagre one of the older orthodoxy of Israel, those expressions had a dry and meagre sense; but to those who were being led to the confines of a nobler faith the same words acquired a depth of significance which the older interpreters only erred in making too logically definite. I would have the expositor recognise in such cases this willingly accepted ambiguity, and admit the legitimacy of two diverse interpretations.

Let us now turn to certain books which most probably belong to the late Persian and early Greek period, and read some passages over again in a Zoroastrian light.¹ I must ask you provisionally to accept my own conclusions as to the dates of the biblical and Zoroastrian writings. The grounds of these conclusions you will naturally seek elsewhere—for instance (not to speak now of the Avesta), in those two lectures on the Problems of the Second Isaiah which I delivered here this term.² My present object is not to prove to you the comparative accuracy of my critical theories, but to show you what some of them come to when applied in illustration of exegesis. And in order to do this, I must read certain passages with you in the light of my theory that the Jewish Church, at the time when they were written, was not uninfluenced by Zoroastrianism. Let us not be discouraged at the vagueness and even the variety of the expressions; there is vagueness and variety enough in the Zoroastrian Scriptures, though the fundamental beliefs of the early Zoroastrianism are sufficiently well known.³ But let us always remember that, on the present hypothesis, the Jewish Church is less developed religiously than the Zoroastrian Church of the same period; we must, therefore, be especially on our guard against assuming a logically formulated doctrine. The passages to which we shall refer are:—(a) Isa. xxv. 8, xxvi. 19; (b) Isa. lxxv. 17–25, lxxvi. 22;

¹ The reader must always bear in mind the qualifications of my theory. Persian influence upon the Jews was both direct and indirect. It was strongest upon those of Persia and Mesopotamia, but far from insignificant upon those of Palestine. But even the former can by no means be supposed to have read the Zoroastrian writings. Does this admission ruin my theory? Surely not. The ideas of book-religions are not propagated even now merely by their religious books. It must also be constantly remembered that Zoroastrian influence was limited by Jewish pre-suppositions. Even the demon Aeshma-deva (Asmodeus) was Hebraised as to his functions.

² These lectures will appear in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* for July and October 1891.

³ The prevalence of the resurrection-belief in the Achaemenian period is hardly doubtful. But that it was questioned by some (we know not exactly when), must be inferred from the Bundeshesh (see Spiegel, *Eran. Alterthümer*, ii. 160).

(c) Dan. xii. 2; (d) Ps. xlix. 15, 16; (e) Ps. xvii. 15; (f) Ps. xvi. 10, 11; (g) Ps. lxxiii. 24-27; (h) Ps. xxi. 5; (i) Ps. xlv. 3; (k) Ps. lxi. 7; (l) Ps. lxxii. 5; (m) Ps. lxxiii. 9, 10; (n) Ps. xi. 7 (cf. cxl. 14); (o) Ps. xli. 13^b; (p) Ps. xxxvi. 10. You will notice that I have put the prophetic passages first—this is because they are the easiest to interpret definitely; also that I have adopted the Hebrew numeration of the verses.

(a) Isa. xxv. 7, 8. This passage belongs to a most interesting but highly artificial work, such as the devout students and imitators of Scripture produced in the post-Exile period. This is a result which is now more and more commonly accepted by critics, and the only question is whether the work belongs to the first or to the second century of Persian rule. To me the latter alternative seems by far the easier one, though I am not prepared to give a historical explanation of all the circumstances alluded to in the prophecy. Nor do I deny the possibility that somewhat older passages may have been found with his own composition by this very late prophet.

Let me try to paraphrase and explain this great prophetic utterance.—The sense of mortality has hitherto been to all nations like a mourner's veil (cf. lxi. 3, corrected text), stifling all natural joy, and restraining the expression of activity. But now, Jehovah having in the fullest sense "become King," it is fitting that all who in many tongues acknowledge Him should realise in their own persons what it is to be in communion with the "living God." Hitherto tears have been a commoner sight than smiles, but now the basis of redeemed human nature shall be joy (cf. lxxv. 18). Hitherto it has been Shéol which has swallowed up (cf. V. 14), but now both death and the unseen realm of death shall, by a solemn act of the King in His capital city, be themselves swallowed up.

Now I will not deny *à priori* that a devout and illuminated thinker might have inferred the future destruction of death from certain fundamental elements of his religion, but it is a striking fact that even such a great prophet as the Second Isaiah did not do so. We cannot leave the difference between the earlier and the later prophet unaccounted for. May not the secret of it be that the one prophet was open, and the other not, to Zoroastrian influences? For it is the glory of the religion of Zarathustra that it has always placed the destruction of death in the forefront of its teaching.

But was the later prophet really so open to Zoroastrian influences? From his date he ought to have been, and from the passage which we group with Isa. xxv. 8, we can, I think, see that he was. I cannot, of course, stop to justify my view of Isa. xxvi. 19, but this is what the passage in its context seems to me to mean. There are two aspects of death to this prophet—the one comfort-

ing, the other discouraging. "Dead men live not; shades rise not (again)," ver. 14. Such is the course of nature; there is no fear that those "other lords besides Jehovah" (Nineveh and Babylon, not Persia, which is in a certain sense a worshipper of Jehovah) who have led Israel captive will renew their oppression. This is a consolation. But here is the reverse side of the picture. "We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not brought the land into full salvation, neither were inhabitants of the world born" (ver. 18).

In other words, the prophecies of restored Israel's happiness have not been fulfilled, and, in particular, whether from famines or from some other of the manifold miseries of the second Persian century, Israel's land is now insufficiently peopled. Cyrus gave but a faint shadow of "salvation," which, with all its efforts, the people of Jehovah cannot make more real. So the Church-nation, in whose name the prophet speaks, casts itself upon the divine faithfulness, and by a mighty act of faith supplicates, or, shall I say? demands, that Jehovah's dead (faithful Israelites of the latter time) may live, and that Israel's dead bodies (which have, perhaps, been "given as food to the birds of heaven," Ps. lxxix. 2) may arise. Those bodies are a precious seed, which the dew of Jehovah, which is the "dew of lights," can bring to light. You will tell me that this was a perfectly legitimate inference from the old prophecy of the revival of the dry bones of the collective nation (Ezek. xxxvii. 1-10), which, as the later prophet saw, implied the revival of each member of the nation. But why is it that no one drew this inference before? Read the passage in the light of Zoroastrianism, and you will find an answer. Its spirit is thoroughly Zoroastrian, and the singular phrase "dew of lights" may be illustrated from the Avesta, where the "endless lights" are the highest heaven where Ahura Mazda dwells. The Church, in ver. 19, is not the recipient of a new revelation; the Zoroastrianising belief in a resurrection must already be current among some, or even many, of its members. Nor need we be surprised to read only of a limited resurrection, for Zoroastrian influence was necessarily limited by Jewish suppositions. But is there not a discrepancy between xxv. 8 and xxvi. 19? For nothing is said in the former passage of resurrection, nor in the latter of immortality. True; but this is an example of that variety of statement of which I have already spoken. Obviously the two passages were not written at quite the same time, and Ewald thinks that they are not by the same author. But even upon Ewald's hypothesis, the writer who combined them must have considered them reconcilable. And surely they are so. Take them together, and you get a consistent picture of the "last things,"

viz. that the deceased faithful Israelites will rise again, and together with those who shall be alive in the Messianic period (and, of course, the converts from "all nations") live for ever.

(b) Isa. lxxv. 17-25.—These verses, which belong to the latest of the passages added to the great Prophecy of Restoration, and to be referred (as I have sought to prove) to the closing part of the Persian period. It is at first, however, very difficult to read them in a Persian light, and even to seize their characteristic idea in its purity, because of the conventionality of the style. It will be helpful to look both at the nearer and at the more distant context (*i.e.* the statements of chap. lxxvi. must not be left out of account). Those who believe that they can trace different hands may be reminded that it is no slight thing to get at the meaning which the latest of the writers (who cannot have lived much later than the earliest) gave to the passage. Now, taking lxxvi. 18-24 into account, we cannot hesitate to conclude that the time to which the prophecy points is (in the larger sense of the term) the Messianic period, which the writer believes to be close at hand. It is in this period, which is introduced by the last great judgment upon the hostile powers of the world, that Jehovah says that He will "create new heavens and a new earth" (lxxv. 17), which, unlike the old, "shall stand perpetually before me" (lxxvi. 22). What is the meaning of this? From the older parts of the Book of Isaiah we see that the final transformation of nature in accordance with the changed fortunes of Israel formed part of the prophetic ideal (see xi. 6-9, xxx. 26, xxxv. 1, 2, 6, 7), and twice (xxxiii. 24, xxxv. 5, 6) the removal of bodily infirmities forms part of a Messianic description. Antediluvian longevity is not elsewhere referred to in such a context, and the mention of sinners in the new Jerusalem is in seeming contradiction (I cannot pause to account for this) to the earlier Messianic promises, Isa. xxxiii. 24, xxxv. 8. At first sight, then, our prophet is developing eschatological germs of genuine Israelitish origin, except in two points which have no affinity to anything in Zoroastrianism.

But let us look a little closer at the passage in its context; we may perhaps have mistaken its meaning, or missed something which modifies it in some essential respect. This strange description may be merely a concession to the weak brethren, like the epilogue of Job, according to the prevailing opinion of commentators. Is there anything in the context which favours this view? Yes, if at least we take the next chapter into account. In lxxvi. 24 we read, "And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorrence unto all flesh." It is, I know, common to say that these words only refer to the

unburied bodies of the dead enemies, which are supposed, by a survival of primitive thought, to retain the consciousness of pain. The sight of the unburied and still tormented bodies will, according to this view of the writer's meaning, fill the spectators with an awful sense of the divine justice. But, on a closer observation, it is but half the primitive theory which this interpretation gives us. The connection of soul and body is not supposed by the child-man to be broken by death. The perpetuation of pain in the dead body necessarily involves the perpetuation of pain in the soul, or in that *eidolon* of a body which belongs to the soul in the underworld.¹ The divine justice, therefore, pursues the wicked after death; this is part of what the prophet means, though with seemly reserve he leaves it unspoken. You may object that the words of an author are the sole data of the commentators. But is this true? For my own part I think that we have not only to study the words of an author (a mere linguist can do this), but sedulously to think ourselves into his mental and emotional situation. The psalmists and prophets continually leave things to be supplied by the reader,² and our prophet does so here.

And now can we not see that Isa. lxxv. 17-25 and lxxvi. 24 express or imply mutually complementary ideas? The explanation which I offer is probably as old as the earliest writer in Enoch. It seems to me none the worse on this account; the history of early exegesis may sometimes suggest neglected exegetical truths. I need not add that I am as far as possible from wishing to adopt the developed eschatology of any later writer. Briefly, then, my view of the prophet's meaning is this. He admits, in defiance to the weaker brethren, and against the letter of Zoroastrianism, that death continues to exist in the new creation, but the death which he means is no evil. For the divine justice, which echoes within the human heart, demands not only everlasting pain, but everlasting happiness. "My servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed" (lxxv. 13). Now the shame of rebellion, as the prophet distinctly says in lxxvi. 24, must be perpetual (lxxvi. 24); how, then, should the joy of redemption be limited to a few hundred years of life? And how can perpetual joy be attained but through death? Now the lastingness of future rewards and punishments is a thoroughly Zoroastrian conception,³ which must have had a stimulating influence for good and for evil on later Jewish thought.

So too is that of the new heaven and the new

¹ See the notes on Isa. lvii. 2, lxxvi. 24, in my commentary.

² Comp. Delitzsch's striking description of the condensed Hebrew and indeed Oriental style in his early work, *Geschichte der jüdischen Poesie*, p. 189.

³ The tradition of the destruction of hell in Bundeshesh, xxx. 31, 32 (West's translation), is self-evidently the product of late theological reflection—late, that is, in comparison with the period of the Achæmenidæ.

earth. Our prophet may indeed have had in his mind two passages of the Second Isaiah (li. 16, l. 11), as he wrote lxx. 17 (lxvi. 22) and lxxvi. 24 respectively; but there is a wide difference between the glowing poetical style of the former and the cool, deliberate, not to say dogmatic manner of the

latter, which implies a different situation, and can be partly accounted for by Zoroastrian influence on the later Jews. It is by no means fatal to this view that our prophet does not copy Zoroastrian details, for instance, the destruction of the old world by fire (see 2 Peter iii. 10).

[We are compelled to do Canon Cheyne the injustice of breaking off his article at this point. The larger and more important portion of it which remains will appear in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES for August.—EDITOR.]

Recent Literature on the Writings of St. John.

LITERATURE ON THE WHOLE FIELD.

1. *Introduction to the Johannine Writings.* By PATON J. GLOAG, D.D., Minister of Galashiels. London: James Nisbet & Co. 8vo, pp. xvii, 440. 1891, 10s. 6d.
2. *The Writers of the New Testament, their Style and Characteristics.* By the late Rev. WILLIAM HENRY SIMCOX, M.A., Rector of Harlaxton. London: Hodder & Stoughton. Crown 8vo, pp. viii, 190. 1890, 2s. 6d.
3. *The Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times; their Diversity and Unity in Life and Doctrine.* By GOTTHARD VICTOR LECHLER, D.D., Ordinary Professor of Theology in Leipzig. Third Edition, thoroughly revised and rewritten; translated by A. J. K. DAVIDSON. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark. 2 vols., cr. 8vo, pp. xxv, 756. 1886, 16s.
4. *Word Studies in the New Testament.* By MARVIN R. VINCENT, D.D., Baldwin Professor of Sacred Literature in the Union Theological Seminary, New York. Vol. II., "The Writings of John." London: James Nisbet & Co. 8vo, pp. 607, 16s.

It is marvellous that Dr. Paton Gloag, upon whom there lies so much responsibility of another kind, should have been able to produce a work of the magnitude of this *Introduction to the Johannine Writings*. And the marvel is the greater when we remember his previous *magna opera*, some of which have been but a short time in our hands, his *Introductions to the Pauline and to the Catholic Epistles*, his *Commentary on the Acts*, his *Baird Lectures on Messianic Prophecy*, and his volume of *Exegetical Studies*. It is another instance in support of the saying that the busiest man has the most time to spare. It would therefore be a poor compliment either to the proverb or to Dr. Gloag to judge the book otherwise than wholly and strictly upon its merits. And there is the less need, since its merits are most where they might be expected to be weakest. There is neither dazzling brilliancy of language, nor dashing originality of thought, but everywhere there are traces of wide

reading and patient hearing, of clear judgment and plain, finished statement. Of a certain book, entitled *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, astonishment has been unkindly professed at the candour of the title. But here, though the subject is great, the study is not short. One thing is manifest above all others, that Dr. Gloag has put into his introduction much conscientious hard work. At the head of each department the literature is given. In no case is the list complete, but the subsequent chapter shows that it has been chosen after personal acquaintance: it is exhausted if not exhaustive. And here and there passing reference to a recent German pamphlet marks the modern open-eyed scholar. Dr. Gloag's position is conservative. It is the beloved apostle who gave us Gospel, Epistles, and Apocalypse. But not even the critic who comes with an absolute negative is denied audience, or his case prejudiced in the statement.

The subject of Mr. Simcox's little book is Style. An earlier volume describes the Greek of the New Testament as a whole, its character as distinguished from classical Greek. In this the several writers of the New Testament are compared with one another as to their peculiarities of language. The writings of St. John occupy barely twenty pages, so that even the limited subject chosen is little more than touched upon. But every line is precious. With the Greek Testament in hand the book must be used, and then it will repay the patient student richly. Once and again in a short sentence some principle is stated: "We feel that, if St. John has an imperfect command of Greek idiom, he has a quite adequate command of Greek vocabulary; he frames his sentences as he can, but he chooses his words as he will." "It does not follow that his language as it is, is not better for the purpose than that of a better Greek scholar." But even these are rare; for the most part the inductions are left to the student's own discernment and patience.

Dr. Lechler's volumes, like Mr. Simcox's little