

conscience, and from the corrupt and immoral practices of a pagan religion, either in the first or twentieth century, Paul says out of a great assurance, 'the mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the spirit is life and peace.' 'Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto SIN, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus!'

The law of personal surrender to the Highest, even by the Cross, is shown in a later portion of this same Epistle to be as reasonable as it is sacred. It is the act which results from the coalition of faith with reason. It is based on the conviction of God's wisdom and goodness, and on the experi-

ence of His mercy. It leads to a fuller knowledge of the Perfect Will which is the moral order of our world.

More, it gives to him who habitually commits himself to it, the security of universal law, and the peace of a universal love. 'Great peace have they that love Thy law.'

That the life of surrender in the Spirit of Christ is according to the highest reason, may be seen at once by conceiving its opposite—a life with no duty, no trust, no love, no godly service.

Truly, 'the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

Recent Biblical and Oriental Archaeology.

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PROFESSOR CURTISS has just published a very interesting¹ book on the materials still existing in the beliefs and practices of the peasantry of Syria and Palestine for the reconstruction of 'primitive Semitic religion.' The book has been published in both Germany and America, the German edition being the more complete of the two; Dr. Hayes Ward has added an Appendix on the early form of the altar and character of the sacrifice depicted on early Babylonian seal-cylinders, and Count Baudissin has prefixed an Introduction. The value of the text is enhanced by the well-chosen illustrations which are scattered through it.

The book, as Professor Curtiss tells us, is the result of four expeditions in 'Bible-lands.' The object of them was not technically archæological, though incidentally a previously unknown 'high-place' was discovered by the explorer at Petra, and he was able to collect fresh topographical details at Gadis, the ancient Kadesh-barnea. What he was looking for were the survivals of old religious beliefs and usages,—evidences of the ancient faith which still lies deep in the heart of the Oriental peasant and Bedâwi nomad under a thin varnish of Muhammadanism or Christianity. In fact, even the varnish is not always observable.

Professor Curtiss was accompanied in his expeditions by missionaries and natives who were well acquainted with the people. The facts he gives us

may therefore be fully trusted, and the picture they disclose is at once interesting and unexpected. Anthropology has taught us that a conquering race is eventually absorbed into the native population of the country it occupies; we now learn that in the East, at anyrate, the same has been the case as regards religion. Though the unmeaning formulæ of Muhammadanism or Christianity may be upon his lips, the illiterate peasant of Syria is still quite as much a pagan as the wild Bedâwi of the desert. And the paganism is that of a remote past. Like the paganism which the students of folk-lore have discovered, not only in continental Europe, but in our own islands, it is for the most part of a primitive character. Hence Professor Curtiss considers himself justified in believing it to represent the religion of the early Semites. In the existing religious and moral ideas of the Syrian peasant he finds the key to that 'primitive Semitic' religion whose secrets Robertson Smith and Wellhausen have sought to unlock in another way.

That in these ideas we have a survival of the past no anthropologist can doubt. But to what extent that past can be called 'primitive Semitic' is another question. Recent excavations at Gezer have shown that when the Semitic race entered Canaan it was already civilized and acquainted with the use of metals. In so far, therefore, as the beliefs and practices discovered by Professor Curtiss presuppose an uncivilized community they are either examples of degeneration or else go back to

¹ *Ursemitische Religion im Volksleben des heutigen Orients.* By Samuel Ives Curtiss. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1904.

the short, dolichocephalic race which preceded the Semites. Moreover, the area covered by his researches lies within that which for unnumbered centuries was under the influence of Babylonian culture. As we now know, Arabia itself was not exempt from this, indeed it was in Arabia that highly civilized kingdoms arose whose power extended from the south of the peninsula to the confines of Babylonia and Palestine. We can consequently no longer exclude the influence of Babylonia, as Robertson Smith wished to do, even when dealing with the early religion of Arabia, and, as I pointed out at the time, to argue as he has done from the beliefs and practices of the wild Bedāwî of the fourth century to those of the early Semitic is like finding a clue to the origin of British Christianity in the beliefs and customs of the gypsies. Anthropology has forced us to recognize the fact that degeneration has been quite as potent a factor as progress in making man what he is to-day.

Hence, instead of calling the practices and beliefs to which Professor Curtiss' evidence points 'primitive Semitic,' I should prefer to term them 'Syrian' or 'Canaanite.' But the term must be used in a geographical and not a racial sense. Canaan, like Great Britain, has been the meeting-place of many races and many civilizations, and the faith and habit of its peasantry to-day have been necessarily coloured and affected by them all. When we know more about ancient Babylonian religion we shall doubtless discover that much which Professor Curtiss now believes to be of native Canaanitish growth really came from the Sumerian predecessors of the Semite in Babylonia.

Still, when every deduction is made, the broad fact remains that the modern peasant of Syria is predominantly a Semite in race, and that the elements of his religion are predominantly those which we find in the religious systems of the Semitic world. And three of these elements have been brought out by Professor Curtiss' researches into clear relief. One is the belief in the power, as opposed to the moral nature, of God. God is regarded as an absolute tyrant, whose will may not be questioned by His creatures any more than the will of the father may be questioned by his children. So far as His creatures can discover, that will is frequently a mere caprice, which is exercised as often unjustly as justly. But such a belief is not necessarily 'primitive.' It was the

belief of ancient Babylonia, originating partly in the conception of an inexorable law which preserved the universe from falling back into chaos, and which the gods themselves were compelled to obey, and partly in an anthropomorphic idea of the deity which assimilated Him to the ruler of a Babylonian state. Thus an old Babylonian king writes: 'What in itself is good, that is evil with the Trinity; what in itself is bad, that is good with the God; who can understand the counsel of God or discover his dark paths?' Even in Hebrew prophecy we read: 'I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things.'

One result of this conception of God is that He is kept out of sight as much as possible. The peasant prefers to escape His notice as he would that of a tyrannical Turkish governor. The powers whom he really worships and propitiates are the shêkhs of Muhammadanism, the saints of Christianity. They are but the old local deities—the Baalim and Ashtaroth of the past—under new names. And one of the most interesting of Professor Curtiss' discoveries is the frankness with which they are worshipped. Thus the guardian of the cave of Khidr—the Muhammadan equivalent of St. George—at the foot of Mount Carmel, said to him: 'Khidr is my god and my father's god!' and elsewhere he was told that St. George and God were brothers. It is to the shêkhs that vows are made and offerings brought, and good and evil are believed to be dispensed by them. They are often spoken of as interceding with God—an echo of that doctrine of intercession which played so large a part in the religion of Babylonia.

A third and important element in modern Canaanite (and Arabian) religion is the atoning character of blood. An important result of Professor Curtiss' investigations is to prove that the theory which traced the origin of sacrifice—at all events in Semitic lands—to a meal, is not only unsupported by the evidence, but contrary to it. The sacrifice consists, not in giving the divine powers a share in a feast, but in the 'shedding of blood' which is offered to the object of worship. Without the shedding of blood there is no sacrifice, and it is the blood alone which averts the divine anger and reconciles the offerer to his god. The flesh is not eaten, either actually or symbolically by the god, nor is the eating of it of a religious character. But the blood is 'life,' and in shedding

it a sign and proof are given that the life demanded by the deity has been yielded up. The deity has a right to everything, like the absolute master of a Semitic state, but he is willing to accept only a part and allow the life of a single victim to be substituted for what he might otherwise claim. Hence it is that the blood is smeared on the walls and entrance of a house, in token that the victim has been offered, and that the angel of destruction must therefore spare its occupants.

This belief in the atoning nature of blood goes back to the very roots of 'Semitic' religion. If Professor Curtiss' researches had produced no other result, the establishment of this fact alone would have amply rewarded them. But his book is full of new and stimulating data of all kinds, and breaks ground in what is in large measure a fresh field of investigation. The present is the child of the past, and if we would understand the past we must first learn what the present has to teach us.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

ACTS VII. 59, 60.

'And they stoned Stephen, calling upon the Lord, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep' (R.V.).

EXPOSITION.

'And they stoned Stephen.'—Went on stoning, *i.e.* while he was praying.—COOK.

'Calling upon the Lord' (*ἐπικαλούμενον*).—Regular word for calling upon a *god* for aid. Translate 'calling upon (the Lord Jesus) and saying 'Lord Jesus . . .'. The only accusative that can be grammatically supplied after *ἐπικαλ.* is τὸν Κύριον Ἰησοῦν.—PAGE.

STEPHEN meanwhile was *calling upon* the Lord whom he had seen to *receive his spirit*. To *call upon* means to invoke in prayer, but the A.V. had no ground for inserting *God*; the object of the prayer was the *Lord Jesus*.—RACKHAM.

'And saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'—The first martyr followed the example of his Lord (Lk 23⁴⁶). Kay has noted several instances of the language of Ps 31⁵ having been used by Christians at the approach of death—Polycarp, Basil, Bernard, Huss, Columbus, Luther, and Melanchthon.—COOK.

'And he kneeled down.'—As Jesus Himself in the agony in Gethsemane (Lk 22⁴¹). The more usual Jewish posture in prayer was standing (*e.g.* the Pharisee and Publican, in Lk 18¹³). But kneeling seems to have been the attitude indicative of a special sense of dependence (*cf.* Mk 15¹⁹, 'Bowing their knees, worshipped him').—BARTLET.

'And cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.'—When we contrast the dying prayer of the O.T. martyr, Zechariah, 'The Lord look upon it and require it,' we see that the Cross had done its work. Like Christ on the cross, Stephen prayed for them—literally, *Set not this sin to them*; where *set* means either, (1) in the set

scales against them, or (2) set it down firm, unmovable to their account.—RACKHAM.

'And when he had said this, he fell asleep.'—The metaphor is common to all languages; but the word is used here in striking contrast with the scene just described. Note, too, the cadence of the word (*ἐκοιμήθη*), expressing rest and repose, and *cf.* the last word of the Acts, *ἀκωλύτως*.—PAGE.

THE calmness of death was depicted in Greek poetry under the figure of sleep. But assurance of a life to come imparted to that figure a deeper meaning on Christian lips, suggested in the first place by Christ Himself (Jn 11¹¹). Christian faith alone could apply such a term to the painful and violent death of the martyr.—RENDALL.

THE SERMON.

Witness of St. Stephen.

By Bishop Wordsworth, D.D., D.C.L.

It is a significant fact that in the Church of England Calendar the Festival of St. Stephen is held on the day after Christmas. This is intentional, because the death of St. Stephen can only be explained by the Birth of Christ, and because of the Death the Birth is glorified. There is a second reason, however, for the juxtaposition of these Festivals. Christmas is a time of joy, and the remembrance of the death of St. Stephen does not sadden the believer; it increases his joy. It reminds us that 'the birth of Christ' is for the Christian the death of death.' In the words of St. John, 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth,' and Stephen 'died in the Lord because he had lived in the Lord'; in the words of the ancient maxim, *Qualis Vita, Talis Mors!* His death was remarkable chiefly for two