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CHRIST AND OSIRIS.

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CHRIST AND OSIRIS.

“Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean ; the world has grown
grey from thy breath ;

We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on the fulness
of death.

O lips that the live blood faints in, the leavings of racks and
rods !

O ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted gods !

Though all men abase them before you in spirit, and all knees
bend,

I kneel not, neither adore you, but standing, look to the end.

* * * * *

Though before thee the throned Cytherean be fallen, and
hidden her head,

Yet thy kingdom shall pass, Galilean, thy dead shall go down
to the dead.” *

REFLECTING here, on the Temple-roof at Karnak, on the general results of our Egyptian studies, we are first of all struck with what I may call the Christian character of Osirianism. But before proceeding to point this out, and to state the hypothesis which this Christian character of Osirianism suggests, it may be desirable to offer a few remarks on the outward, and hence more vulgarly appreciated characteristics of the Egyptian religion. For, in amazement at any likening of Osirianism to Christianity, or of Christianity to Osirianism, many readers may, as if in

* Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads, Hymn to Proserpine*, pp. 79-80.

settlement of any suggestion even of a causal relation between Osirianism and Christianity, ask, 'Were not the Egyptians, as a matter of fact, idolaters, and worshippers, indeed, of the most grotesque and monstrous idols?' But let us understand what idolatry means. Possibly, you who put this question may be more of an idolater than were the ancient Egyptians when they first created their Gods. Idolatry is ceremonial worship when the meaning of the ceremonies and symbols is lost. We are helped to the understanding of this by the study of language, in its first formations. Names, as a class of signs,* are themselves but a kind of symbols. In the formation of a language, they are at first uttered certainly not without a meaning; they certainly are the attempt to denote some thing, or express some want, hitherto nameless, unutterable. Yet these names, at first so meaningful, may in time so completely lose their original meaning, as to become the terminations of a declension.† So symbols, animal-headed deities, and others. What if the symbol, in later times, so lost its meaning as to be itself worshipped? Originally it had carried the mind from itself to that which it signified. And as, in Language, 'the formation of substantive nouns is the first stage of personifying God;‡ so, in Religion, the creation of symbols is the first stage of idolatry. We shall hereafter have occasion to consider idol-creation more fully, and from other points of view. Here I will only remark, that a reference to the idolatry of the Egyptians is unfortunate, if it is intended thereby to disprove the likeness of Osirian-

* 'A name is a word taken at pleasure to serve for a *mark* which may raise in our mind a thought like to some thought we had before, and which, being pronounced to others, may be to them a *sign* of what thought the speaker had, or had not, before in his mind.'—Hobbes, *Computation or Logic*, ch. ii., cited by Mill, *System of Logic*, vol. II. p. 23.

† See Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*.

‡ Bunsen, *Egypt's Place*, vol. IV. p. 566.

ism to Christianity. For we shall find that it is just in comparing these two Creeds in this matter of idolatry, that—when we set Yahvehism between them—their likeness comes out most strongly—the religion of Abraham, whether as Judaism, or as Mohammedanism, acting as a foil, and bringing out with startling clearness, at once, the Osirian character of Christianity, and the Christian character of Osirianism.

2. But is the Animal-worship of the Egyptians next objected against any comparison of Osirianism with Christianity, or any hypothesis with respect to the origination of the latter in a transformation of the former? Well, it is admitted that that exaggerated care for animals which becomes a superstitious worship of them is not a feature of Christian religious emotion. But in the Animal-worship which—probably derived from an aboriginal African element in the population*—was, soon after the time of Menes, incorporated with Osirianism throughout the Empire, there should seem to have been an idea which modern Science tends more and more clearly to establish—the identity, namely, of the principle of life in all its manifestations.† ‘And what is this,’ asks Bunsen, ‘but a specific adaptation of that consciousness of the divinity of Nature, which is implied in all the religious consciousness of the Old World?’‡ The doctrine of transmigration thus became a sacred link between animal and human life. And ‘the community between the human and animal soul being once admitted, we can understand how the Egyptians at last arrived at the idea of worshipping in animals a living manifestation of Divinity.’§ But if a similar doctrine is not found in Christianity,

* Bunsen, *Egypt's Place*, vol. iv. p. 637

† See Spencer, *Principles of Biology*, and *Principles of Psychology*.

‡ Bunsen, *Egypt's Place*, vol. iv. p. 640.

§ *Ibid.* vol. iv. p. 641.

one is tempted to say that the want of it is much to be regretted. For there have been, and even still are, few worse features in Christian Civilization than its apathy to animal suffering.* And it is very noteworthy that it was the great Apostle of the Utilitarian School of Moralists who, in that very year from which dates a new period of the Modern Revolution, 1789, introduced into European Ethics the consideration of 'the interests of other animals.'† So likewise, a new care for, and new appreciation of animals is one of the characteristic features of Comte's conception of the New Religion of Humanity.‡ And if, at length, men are beginning *again* to become sympathetically aware that other animals also besides themselves feel pain, and that it is shameful and dastardly to inflict pain unnecessarily upon them; if there is now some hope that Christian 'sports' may, at length, be done away with, and animal-barbarities generally; and if, in realising that fact of physical kinship with our Elder Brethren, which Science affirms, and Christianity scouts, there is being developed some nobler sympathy also with them—this, at least, it must be admitted, is certainly not owing to any doctrine in Christianity that can be paralleled in Osirianism.

3. The considerations thus suggested on the 'Idolatry' and on the 'Animal-worship' of the Egyptians may, I trust, prepare us candidly now to consider the more essential doctrines of Osirianism—those doc-

* As to Christian cruelty generally, we must not recall the gladiatorial combats of the Roman amphitheatre, without recalling also the heretic burnings of every chief town in Christendom. Nor is Classic civilization to be judged by the days of its decline; but rather, as also Christian civilization, by the days of its prime. And that the Middle Ages were the prime of Christian civilization is proved by the fact, that the movement which has, since then, modified Christianity has tended more and more to sweep it, both as a doctrinal and as a social system, away.

† Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ch. XVII.

‡ See Mill, *Comte and Positivism*.

trines which are so remarkably similar to the great dogmas of Christianity. And with respect to what the great religious doctrines of the Egyptians really were, we are not now in any doubt. For one of the grandest achievements of Modern Science* has been the translation of their Funeral Ritual, the 'Todtenbuch,' or 'Book of the Dead,' as Lepsius called it, or as it calls itself, the 'Departure into Light.'† It belongs to Bunsen's fourth class of those Sacred Books which would form collectively the Bible of the ancient Egyptians, and is scarcely posterior to 3,000 years before our era.‡ For, as Bunsen points out, we have a very remarkable proof that the origin of the prayers and hymns of this Ritual belongs probably to the Pre-Menite Dynasty of Abydos, between 3100 and 4500 B.C., in the fact that we find one of these hymns,§ not in its original simplicity, but already mixed up with glosses and commentaries, inscribed on the coffin of Queen Mentuhept of the eleventh dynasty. This monumental text agrees with the printed text of the Turin papyrus. And though the first year of the eleventh dynasty, which lasted forty-three years, cannot be placed earlier than 2782 B.C.;¶ yet, if we consider the many stages

* 'The interpretation of the extinct languages of Egypt and Central Asia will ever rank as one of the distinguishing features of the nineteenth century.'—Birch, in Bunsen's *Egypt's Place*, vol. v. p. ix.

† Or 'Manifestation to Light,' according to Champollion and Dr. Birch. The complete translation by the latter was only published with the fifth volume of Bunsen's *Egypt* in 1867. But I had with me at Thebes the previous volumes, besides Wilkinson's *Ancient Egyptians* and other works; and I had the advantage of perusing and making copious extracts from the translation of an American Egyptologist who was residing at Luxor. Even Dr. Birch's translation, however, must be considered as representing the state of hieroglyphical knowledge rather twenty years ago than now—so long was its publication, owing to various causes, delayed. The translation of the 'Todtenbuch,' to which students must now refer, is that by Brugsch, now in course of publication. My references, however, here, will be to Dr. Birch's Translation, as probably more accessible to the majority of readers.

‡ Bunsen, *Egypt's Place*, vol. iv. p. 646.

§ It forms chapter xvii. of the Ritual. See Birch's translation in *Egypt's Place*, vol. v. pp. 172-80.

¶ Compare *Egypt's Place*, vol. v. pp. 29, 88, and 94.

that must have been passed through, before the original hymn, learned by heart, and recited from memory, became mixed-up with scholia in an undivided sacred text, we cannot but date its composition and primitive use many centuries anterior to that dynasty in which we find it thus embedded in explanations. This hymn implies not only the worship of Osiris, but the whole system of doctrines connected with his redeeming life on Earth, and judicial office in Heaven. Yet an antiquity, even greater than is thus witnessed-to, we are obliged to assign to Osirianism, by the fact that the Osiris-myth itself mentions 'Byblus (Gebal in Phœnicia) as the place where Isis brought up the young Osiris.* And this derivation from Asia is further confirmed by the universally admitted identity of 'the fundamental ideas of the worship, and sacred ceremonials of Adonis and Osiris.† To the very earliest period, then, of the history of Humanity, as the history of Thought, we must carry back the ideas of the Osirian Faith. And yet, we may possibly find in the sequel, that it is but a transformed Osirianism that, to this day, dominates Christendom.

4. Considered as a whole, the 'Departure into Light' is a revelation in something of an epic, and even occasionally dramatic form of the departure of the Soul into the Other-world, of its judgment, and of what is required of it, in order to its final beatific reception by its Father Osiris. Its formularies may, perhaps, best be arranged under such heads as the following:—I. General Address. II. Address to each of the Forty-two Assessors. III. Announcement of Justification. IV. Telling the names of different parts of the Temple. V. Blessings, &c.‡ According to Egyptian notions, it was 'essentially an inspired

* *Egypt's Place*, vol. iv. p. 347.

† *Ibid.*

‡ Compare Birch's introduction to his translation, *Egypt's Place*, vol. v.

work; and the term Hermetic, so often applied by profane writers to these books, in reality means inspired. It is Thoth himself who speaks, and reveals the will of the Gods, and the mysterious nature of divine things to man.* Portions of them are expressly stated to have been written by the very finger of Thoth himself, and to have been the composition of a great God.† And in this, it may be noted by the way, that we see an illustration of what, in the Introduction, was pointed out as one of the general characteristics of the First Age of Humanity, namely, the authorlessness, for the most part, of its Literature, and its attribution, to supernatural sources. But sacred this Ritual was also esteemed as 'assuring to the soul a passage from the Earth; a transit through the purgatory and other regions of the Dead; the entrance into the Empyrean Gate, by which the souls arrived at the presence of God, typified by the Sun; the admission into the Bark, or Orb of the Sun, ever traversing in brilliant light the liquid ether; and protection from the various Liers-in-wait, or Adversaries, who sought to accuse, destroy, or detain it in its passage, or destiny.‡ In this most ancient book of the Osirian Scriptures there is, no doubt, not only a vast mass of unintelligible ritualistic allusions, but evidence of gross superstition. Not, however, without evidence of this, are also the Christian Scriptures. And it must be borne in mind that the Osirian Bible had not the good fortune to be, in the formation of its canon, purged, as was the Christian, of impurer, apocryphal elements. Yet, notwithstanding this misfortune, the religious tone of the Osirian Ritual is such as the following brief extracts may serve, though inadequately, to illustrate.

* *Ibid.* p. 133.

† See chapter lxiv., Rubric.

‡ Birch in *Egypt's Place*, vol. v. p. 134.

5. Very touching are some of the expressions in which the Departed calls on Osiris to save him from his Accusers, from the Lake of Fire, and from the Tormentors. Addressing these with the noble boldness of great faith, 'says Osiris Anfanch . . . while you strive against me, your acts against me are against Osiris. . . . To strive against me, is as against Osiris.' Again: 'Let me come, having seen and passed, having passed the Gate to see my Father Osiris. I have made way through the darkness to my Father Osiris. I am his beloved. I stab the heart of Sut. I do the things of my Father Osiris. I have opened every door in heaven and earth. I am his beloved son. I have come from the mummy, an instructed spirit.' And again: 'says Osiris Anfanch, save me, as thou savest what belongs to thy word; catch me up; the Lord is God, there is but one God for me (or, before the Lord of Mankind, there is but one Lord for me).' A passage, this, which is but one of many* proving the monotheism of the better instructed, or more deeply thinking, of those whom the narrow ignorance of that Creed propagated by the Galilæan Fishermen sets down as 'idolatrous heathens.' He who is thus represented as speaking in a certain stage of his progress to the region of 'Sacred Repose,' is more particularly described in the beginning of some papyri as 'Osiris Anfanch of the true faith, born of the lady Souhenchem of fair fame.' The prefix to the man's name of that of God himself is the 'new name' which every true believer receives after death. In other passages the good man is even spoken of as an Osiris. 'The Osiris lives, after he dies, like the sun daily; for as the sun dies, and is born in the morning, so the Osiris dies.' And finally, as to that immortality which is so ignorantly imagined to have

* See chap. iv. sect. iii.

been 'brought to light by the Gospel,' the Osiris exclaims in another passage: 'I do not die again in the Region of Sacred Repose.' And again. 'Who-soever does what belongs to him, visibly (individually?) his soul participates in Life Eternal.' And again. 'Plait for thyself a garland . . . thy life is everlasting.'

6. But it is the central doctrine of Osirianism that more particularly claims our attention. 'The peculiar character of Osiris,' says Sir Gardner Wilkinson, 'his coming upon Earth for the benefit of mankind, with the title of "Manifester of Good" and "Revealer of Truth;" his being put to death by the Malice of the Evil One; his burial and Resurrection, and his becoming the Judge of the Dead, are the most interesting features of the Egyptian Religion. This was the great mystery; and this myth and his worship were of the earliest times and universal in Egypt.* And, with this central doctrine of Osirianism, so perfectly similar to that of Christianity, doctrines are associated precisely analogous to those associated in Christianity with its central doctrine. In ancient Osirianism, as in modern Christianity, the Godhead is conceived as a Trinity, yet are the three Gods declared to be only one God. In ancient Osirianism, as in modern Christianity, we find the worship of a Divine Mother and Child. In ancient Osirianism, as in modern Christianity, there is a doctrine of Atonement. In ancient Osirianism, as in modern Christianity, we find the vision of a Last Judgment, and Resurrection of the Body. And finally, in ancient Osirianism, as in modern Christianity, the sanctions of morality are a Lake of Fire and tormenting Demons, on the one hand, and on the other, Eternal Life in the presence

* *Ancient Egyptians* (Popular Edition), vol. i. p. 331. Compare Second Series of the larger work, vol. i. p. 320.

of God. Is it possible, then, that such similarities of doctrines should not raise the most serious questions as to the relation of the beliefs about Christ to those about Osiris; as to the cause of this wonderful similarity of the doctrines of Christianity to those of Osirianism; nay, as to the possibility of the whole doctrinal system of Modern Orthodoxy being but a transformation of the Osiris-myth? But if so—you logically argue with amazed incredulity—all the most sacred dogmas of the Christian faith would be proved to have originated but in the influence of a 'heathen' religion—a religion over the scenes of which we Christians ordinarily pass with the most complacent contempt? Nay, if so; if the doctrines of Christianity had but such an origin; must not the Christian 'Revelation' be acknowledged utterly worthless to prove the reality of any one of the supernatural facts which its doctrines affirm—even a Personal Immortality, for instance, or a Personal God?

7. Well, be the consequences what they may, we must find out what is the fact. And there is certainly no escape in the desperate hypothesis to which the manifestly Christian character of Osirianism has driven some to have recourse—the hypothesis that these doctrines of Osirianism were, somehow or other, themselves a 'supernatural revelation.' For the discovery of Osirianism is the discovery of the missing link between Christianity and Heathenism generally, the religions of the First Age of Humanity, or what I have termed Naturianism. It has hitherto appeared not only a crime but a blunder, not merely a blasphemy but a frivolity, to compare the Christian doctrines of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, and of the Death and Resurrection of Christ with the similar doctrines of Naturian Religions. But the doctrines of a Trinity, of an Incarnation, and of the Death and Resurrection of a God-man are

developed in Osirianism with such gravity, such moral purity, and such splendour, that we cannot hesitate to honour them by a comparison with these doctrines as developed in Christianity. Yet, from Osirianism the gradation is so gentle through the whole series of Nature-worships down to the lowest, that, having compared the story and worship of Christ with the worship and myth of Osiris, we find ourselves necessarily comparing the Christian story and worship with the worship and myth of Dionysus, nay, of Adonis, and of Thammuz,—of Thammuz,

Whose annual wound in Lebanon allured
The Syrian damsels to lament his fate,
In amorous ditties all a summer's day.*

And hence if, to support the common belief in the supernatural origin of Christianity, it is concluded that the manifestly similar and unquestionably earlier doctrines of Osirianism had a supernatural origin; then, as we thus find it impossible to draw a line separating the highest of the Heathen religions from the lowest, a supernatural origin must also be supposed for all those Heathen religions in which we find—and where do we not find?—the story of a divine man dying, and—though but to rise again—‘in amorous ditties’ annually lamented.† But so great are the interests at stake, that even an hypothesis so wild as this, it may be attempted to defend. For, as has just been suggested, if these Heathen beliefs in the incarnation of a God-man, and in Heaven and Hell, have no sort of supernatural authority; and if Osirianism is, indeed, the missing link that connects Christianity with every one of

* Milton, *Paradise Lost*.

† Δῆγε γόων, Κυβέρεια, τὸ σήμερον Ἰσχυεο κομμῶν.

Δεῖ σε πάλιν κλαῦσαι, πάλιν εἰς ἔτος ἄλλο δακρῦσαι.

Bion, *Epitaph. Adon.*

these religions; what authority is there for the objective reality of any one of those supernatural existences, belief in which is thus found to be common to Christianity, and Heathenism generally? An attempt, therefore, will doubtless be made to prove the supernatural and divine origin of Heathenism. And truly, when we recall Christian denunciations of, and missions to the 'Heathen;' when we find that the essential doctrines of 'Heathenism' are, just as in Christianity, a Trinity, an Incarnation, and a Future State of Reward and Punishment; hence that—as such doctrines can have no guarantee of objective reality, except they have had a supernatural origin—all must have had such an origin, or none; and hence that, to guarantee the validity of their own beliefs, Christians must maintain the divine origin of those of Heathenism; there is seen such a profound and tragic irony in the situation that we become more than ever attached to the study of that sublime drama—the history of Man.

8. Any hope, however, of establishing a theory of the supernatural origin of the doctrines of Osirianism, how 'Christian' soever they may be, has had, I trust the ground cut from under it, by the facts, in the foregoing chapter brought together, in explanation of these doctrines as *myths*. For, before any theory of the supernatural origin of these doctrines can be maintained, the facts must be met which were in the foregoing chapter summarised as explanatory of the *origin* of the myths of Naturianism. These facts were, as will be remembered, first, those which define the character of the spontaneity of Mind; secondly, the facts of the conditions under which that spontaneity worked in primæval societies; and thirdly, those explanations of modern spiritist conceptions which confirm the theory by which we explain the origin of primitive spiritist conceptions. Before any rational attempt, therefore, any attempt worthy of

scientific notice, can be made to account for the Christian character of the doctrines of Osirianism, and of the other 'Heathen' religions, by attributing to them some sort of supernatural origin in a 'primitive revelation;' those three great classes of facts, psychological, economical, and physio-psychological, in the foregoing chapter summarised, must be shown to be, not only severally, but jointly inadequate to explain, as not only of a natural, but as of a very low natural origin, the formation of such doctrines as those which give to Osirianism its Christian character. Nor are these the only facts which must be met before a scientific hearing even can be gained for any hypothesis that would give to the doctrines, whether Christian or Osirian, of a Trinity, a life, death, and resurrection of a God-man, and an Other-world of Reward and Punishment, any sort of supernatural origin, and hence any degree of authoritative sanction. For besides the great classes of facts just specified, those also must be met which, in proving the conception of Mutual Determination to be the true and ultimate conception of Causation, show such hypotheses, as this of a supernatural origin of these doctrines, to belong properly only to, or to be derived from, the earlier, and more ignorant stages of men's knowledge of the relations of things. But these facts have not as yet been met by any of the arguers for the supernatural origin, and therefore authoritative truth of theological doctrines. We must conclude, therefore, that if, similar though the doctrines of Christianity are to the myths of Osirianism, and of Naturianism generally, a special and independent origin *cannot* be proved for them; they were but derived from, or but transformations of these myths. And if so, then, belief in them has, at bottom, no diviner sanction than the labour-driven ignorance, and priest-ridden servility which—resulting from the economical conditions under which

mental spontaneities originally worked—led to what were but the mere subjective fictions of the myth-creating imagination being taken for objective realities. Our hypothesis, as it first presented itself, was simply, that the similarity of the doctrines of Osirianism to those of Christianity was such as to be naturally explained only by showing that the earlier importantly influenced the development of the later Creed. We now, however, see that, if it is to such an origin that the doctrines of Christianity are to be traced, we cannot stop here. If the Christian doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, and Other-world, are in any way to be derived from the myths of Osirianism, or generally, of Naturianism; they had in these myths but their proximate origin. Their ultimate origin must, therefore, have been identical with the origin of these myths; and, like that, to be found but in those base conditions, in the foregoing chapter set forth, of primitive spiritist conceptions.

9. Unquestionably, the verification of an hypothesis which, to such an origin as this, would trace the myths of Christianity, is of the very gravest import. For it is almost incredibly tragical, that the sorrow of a Milton, for instance, in meditating on the death of Christ, had—so far as that sorrow was occasioned by the thought of a divine person, an incarnate God, who had come voluntarily on earth for the good of mankind—no more ground of actual objective fact than had the lamentations of the Syrian damsels, whom the great Christian poet, all unconscious of being himself the victim of a similar bitter-sweet delusion, scornfully represents as, 'in amorous ditties,' bewailing such a fiction of their own imaginations as a Thammuz or Adonis. And yet, if we consider the hypothesis here suggested, on the Temple-roof at Karnak, in relation to our Ultimate Law of History, we shall see that such an origin as we have here been led to suppose for the doctrines of Christianity—we

shall see that a transformation of the myths of Naturianism in such doctrines as those of Christianity—is but a deduction from our Ultimate Law, and a deduction, the verification of which will be one of the most important verifications of that Law. For, of that Law the great central affirmation is, that the passage from the earlier to the later mode of conceiving Causation is through a transitional age marked by the differentiation of Subjective and Objective; a differentiation implying a great development of individuality, of subjectivity, of morality; but not a differentiation implying anything more than greater abstractness merely in the primitive spiritist conception of Causation. But if so, then it will evidently follow that the spiritist beliefs which have dominated the First Age of Humanity, will not be destroyed, but only undergo a *moral* transformation. And what is it that we find in the doctrines of Christianity but just this—all the old myths of Osirianism revived in such an identical fashion *intellectually*, that,—put but Christ for Osiris,—and the general description of the one creed is an accurate description of the other? Only in the moral spirit of Christianity is there a change. But this is just what, from our Ultimate Law of History, we should expect to find; and the fact, therefore, which can be for it but a most important verification. This changed moral spirit, however, in no way affects the objective validity of the myths in which it is expressed. These continue to be but a *language*; a language in which other sentiments were expressed before Christianity; and a language which, after Christianity, will still survive for the expression of ideal emotion. And shocking though to some may be the thought of the utter unreality of the supernatural beings affirmed by Christianity, as by Osirianism; such is the spectacle here, at Karnak, presented, of the sublime tragedy of Human Existence; that, if it is in any degree duly felt, it will be

impossible for one to shrink from clearly stating to oneself the truth, however destructive it may be. As other Ideals have perished, so,—it would be presumptuous to deny,—may ours. Very far are we from being the first who have experienced the agony of discovered delusion.

