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First Text Book
in Comparative
❖ Religion ❖

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THE FIRST TEXT BOOK

IN

COMPARATIVE RELIGION

BY
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COMPARATIVE RELIGION

IF one proposed to give a full description of the great river Yang-tse, and should begin at Kiukiang, giving details of the lower section, and barely touching upon the upper part, it would be declared very inadequate. Yet a treatment akin to what that would be is characteristic of much of the treatment in our day of the great subject called COMPARATIVE RELIGION.

The value of study along the new branch of theological inquiry is doubted by no one. Originally Western theologians and Christian missionaries were interested in the study by reason of its bearing on their own undertaking. In order to success it was essential to know the nature of the opposing religions that Christianity was to deal with, to understand the secret of their hold on their votaries, and, furthermore, to

measure off the common ground between them, so as to avoid needless collision and to utilize all existing auxiliary possibilities. From the first inception of missions this has been a characteristic of the best workers. Mention could have been made of dozens and dozens of volumes that have been written to set forth the nature of Hinduism, and Buddhism, and Confucianism. There is no lack of means of information on the subject. The "Three Religions of China," as they are called, are certainly well set forth by most able missionaries; and the missionaries do study the books written. They are not ignorant of what they are about, as now and then somebody intimates they are.

But of late years a new turn has been given to the study of Comparative Religion, and a new use is being made of its ascertainments and deductions. A kinship between Christianity and the worship of "other gods" is to be made out, which is a wide departure from the original positions taken by the early missionaries. It is not intended to enter into them here. This might bring on discussion more than these pages will allow, and more than might be profitable. The purpose of this pamphlet is to call attention to

the proper starting point in all reading and inquiry on the whole subject.

If any one is to give a full description of the Yang-tse he must go beyond Kiukiang, and beyond Hankow, and beyond Chungking. He must begin at the head waters. If we are to have a thorough survey of Comparative Religion in its relation to the worship of Jehovah we must go back to the Old Testament. We must go back of those Ten Great Religions enumerated by James Freeman Clarke. Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Islamism, and other "isms" are not the starting point. These religions are the daughters, most of them, of still older religions. It is those older and those mother religions that we need to study far more thoroughly than is commonly done by present-day writers on Comparative Religion, if we are to judge by relativities as they appear in their books and essays. The Old Testament is the oldest book extant on Comparative Religion. It is not only the oldest book, but it is an authoritative book. The religions it treats of were ethnic religions in their day. The accounts given of them are sufficiently full and specific for all our needs. We are enabled to estimate

their moral character and value, their relations to Jehovah worship and the attitude of Jehovah toward them. Precepts and actual occurrences and explicit declarations in great fullness are there, extending over a period of two thousand years of history.

First of all, in the Old Testament, we have the beginning of human worship, the origin of religion. We have the worship of Jehovah standing out for ages supreme and alone. Then we have the advent of other religions, departures from the original worship, not approaches to it, but departures, separations, substitutions, and usurpations. We have the worship of "the Host of Heaven," Bel worship or Baal worship, Moloch worship, Dagon worship, with the beginnings of nature worship, of hero worship, of ancestor worship, and of other kinds in addition. In connection with the abundant Old Testament disclosures on Comparative Religion we have in Romans I, in the New Testament, a divine summary of the whole world's experience and of God's irreversible judgment in the entire case.

Appended is a table to illustrate the relations between the worship of the one true God and the worship of "other gods."

PERIOD OF THE WORSHIP OF THE ONE AND THE ONLY.—The Creator of the Heavens and the Earth, the Most High God, the Almighty, Jehovah, Elohim, El Shaddai. This period reaches from Adam down till some hundred or more years after the flood. No traces of polytheism or other theism of any kind, nor of idolatry. A sacred day is one of its characteristics. Worship consisted in "walking with," in gifts, and subsequently in expiatory sacrifices. Ideas and practices originated in those days of exclusive monotheism were certainly handed down to subsequent generations, and became a heritage of the different kinds of heathenism which subsequently arose, and which had thus a large appropriated stock to start with when they departed from God. In the line of development we come successively to

Noah.

THE RISE OF HEATHENISM.—It arose gradually. The older forms were lofty. Worship of the "Host of Heaven," deification of attributes, Sun worship, Nature worship, called the worship of "Other gods." Overlap of monotheism and the subsequent polytheism. Degradation rapid and fearful. Order of the down grade (Rom. 1:23). Its opportunity to borrow ideas and usages from Jehovah worship, the place of which it was fast usurping. Mutual antagonism of Jehovah worship and heathenism (Rom. 1).

Abraham and Faith.

Moses and the Law.

Sabeism.

Old Testament Heathenism.

Indian Heathenisms.

Christ and the Gospel.

Greek and Roman Heathenisms.

Miscellaneous Heathenisms down to the present.

THE RISE OF PHILOSOPHY.—Some knowledge of the One True God still lingered. Contenting with polytheism. So long as that knowledge remained no need for philosophy, which is a search for the *Whence*, the *How*, and the *Whither* of all things. When at last the sun had set and the knowledge was lost, then began the search for the *Arkee*, the "beginning of all things."

Indian Philosophy takes the lead.

Greek Philosophy follows.

Modern Philosophy brings up the rear.

THE RISE OF SCIENCE considered as a religious factor only.

Consideration of the last two deferred.

To-day all struggling for mastery, like the four winds on the great sea.

The table, as will be seen, represents four stages or periods of human history as affecting religion. In addition to what appears in the table itself some enlargements and elucidations will be in order.

FIRST STAGE.

The period of the worship of the One, the Supreme. Notwithstanding the multitudes that must have lived at the time of the flood we have no traces as yet of polytheism among them. Prior to the fall, the worship of Jehovah was manifested in companionship or walking together. The voice of God was heard walking in the garden; there were conversations and conferences, beyond question, as appears from the fact that God made the beasts appear before Adam, and he gave them names suggested by appearance or qualities. A holy day, specially holy, was one of the institutions of the hour. After the fall, gifts and sacrifices were added to agencies of worship. The former were then doubtless, as they have been ever since, expression of thanksgiving for blessings and an acknowledgment of God's ownership and providence, and also tributes of service. The sacrifices came from God himself. Adam and Eve

made aprons of fig leaves for themselves; this was to be their "covering"; the idea afterward embodied in the Old Testament word for atonement, which means a "covering." A few verses later we are told the Lord God made them coats of skins. But to get those skins life had to be taken. The idea of a vicarious covering was introduced at the very start with the very first pair that sinned. Life must be taken, in order that the consequences of the fall may be remedied. The antagonism between the two forms of righteousness, the human and the divine, thus began at the gates of Eden, and has been kept up ever since. A distinction between beasts, clean and unclean, was also a heritage of that early form of pure religion.

SECOND STAGE.

Some time after the flood we see the rise of paganism. In the old Accadian, the Chaldean, the Babylonian, and the Egyptian religions we are first made acquainted with sun worship. A knowledge of the supreme intelligence was not gone by any means, but men liked to behold symbols and to have similitudes. The splitting up of the monotheistic conception is seen in the religion of Egypt and also in the Vedic religions

at a later day. The sun rising was called by one name, the sun at noon-day by another, and at night by another. Practically three gods were made out of one. The overlap of pure Jehovah worship and idolatrous worship is very conspicuous in Bible history. The former was fading out, and the latter was coming in, and the period of overlap was centuries in coming on, and they continue unto this day overlapping each other. The secret of the rise of heathenism is that men did not like to retain God in their knowledge. His character for uprightness and exacting holiness was distasteful to them, so they substituted something else to satisfy the demands of their nature. Hero worship and ancestor worship and worship of the dead came in, also the substitution of heaven for the personal Being himself who dwells in heaven. This will not seem strange to any one who has noticed the fact that public men who are not Christians, if they have any occasion to refer to God, will speak of him as "heaven," or "providence," or some other word that enables them to evade personality.

With our Old Testament text-book now before us, and Comparative Religion being the subject in hand, we cannot fail to note as regards Jehovah

worship and the worship of other gods, the irreconcilable antagonism that exists between them from beginning to end. The worship of other gods was not a "feeling after God," or a seeking after God. We see nothing of that kind till the rise of philosophy. It was a departure from God, an alienation from the life of God, a substitution of other gods for the true God, an ascription to other gods of the glory which belonged exclusively to the One and the Only; it was the changing of the truth of God into a lie and a serving of the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever.

The literature of the Old Testament bearing on the subject is exceedingly full and exceedingly specific. It ranges itself into two classes:

1. *Passages which show the effect of heathenism on the theocracy.*—From first to last this was corrupting; time and again were the children of God led into idolatrous participation, and time and again did the judgments of God come upon them in consequence. Baal-Peor was only a sample. The long period of the judges was filled with examples of like enticements. They feared the gods of the Amorites at one time, and bowed down to the gods of the Moabites at

another. Heathen worship, with its sensuousness and its loose morality and its visible forms, had an attraction for the unsanctified masses of the people. All through the Kings too, do we find insidious heathenism working its way in, first in one way and then in another. The gods of the heathen round about, the altars, and the rituals, and the temples, and the groves, and the festivals, and the outward display, the necromancy, the witchcraft, the soothsaying and stargazing, all offered a perpetual temptation to a corrupt nature. Over and over again did heathenism nearly prove the ruin of Israel. On account of it did the people have their land invaded, their dwellings sacked, their temples burned, and themselves carried into captivity. Heathenism was the bane of Israel and the curse of Israel. How could it be otherwise? The character of the gods of the heathen are all well set forth in the word of God: Their Moloch, their Baal, their Ashtaroth, their Remphan, their Dagon, bloody, murderous, revengeful, lustful, and devilish, are all fully portrayed—gods of wood and gods of stone, dumb idols that cannot see, nor hear, nor move. To have anything directly or indirectly to do with such religions and such

gods was dishonoring to God, debasing to the character, and perpetually productive of ruin and rejection.

2. *Passages which show the attitude of the theocratic head toward heathenism.*—Antagonism could not be more positive, more unyielding, or more intense. Jehovah regarded the worship of other gods as a usurpation of his place and prerogative. He demanded that his people should cut themselves loose from all connection with it. He separated them by rites and ceremonies, circumcision among them, intended to make it difficult to associate with idolaters. He denounced idolatry and all manner of physiolatry and symbol worship, all institutions of similitude, even for himself. He denounced the institutors of idolatry and condemned such to death without mercy. Tampering with familiar spirits, dealing in witchcraft, making cuttings for the dead, come in the same category of things, for which sure and swift judgment came down from heaven. What else could be expected under a declaredly theocratic administration than the utmost detestation of the worse than beastliness of such things as Phallicism, the ferocities of Molochism, and the putridity of Ashtarothism. The slaughter

of Baal-Peor, the slaying of the four hundred priests of Baal at Carmel, were not mere outbreaks of fanaticism on the part of Moses and Elijah. They were the outbursts of divine vengeance and the vindication of a broken law of holiness, and Moses and Elijah were only officers of the Court of Justice. So it is all the way through the Old Testament. Anti-idolatrous literature, anti-idolatrous denunciation, occupy a most prominent place in the whole history of the chosen people. So intense was the divine antagonism to these false religions, and so exacting were the regulations made to preserve the people from their contamination, that they were commanded, when they captured a place, to burn the graven images of their gods with fire; the gold and silver which was on these images was not so much as to be "desired"; they were not to take it unto themselves, lest they should be snared by that which was an abomination to the Lord their God. "Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it, but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it, for it is a cursed thing" (Deut. 7 : 25, 26). There was to be no religious association, and no fraternization, and no compro-

mise, and no alliance of any kind, no recognition of any parity of right to exist on the same soil. Jehovah was against idols, as idols were against Jehovah, and by idols now we mean the system of heathenism as a whole ; the two systems were subversive of each other in their very natures. The one represented the work of God and the other the work of devils. The children of Israel had once offered sacrifices to devils, but now they were told they were to offer sacrifices in a given way, at a given place, and in a given manner, and they shall "no more offer their sacrifices unto devils."

It did not alter the case that in those primitive religions of Canaan there was much that was good. There was none of them but what had some good. For instance, they had a god of grain to whom they gave thanks, and they acknowledged dependence and gave thanks for mercies received, and they confessed to sinfulness and the need of expiation, and they had moral precepts and moral requirements, and sacred days and devout observances, and in many respects were very religious. Beyond question they impressed upon their children many civic and domestic virtues. We have only to look

into the ancient ethical systems of Egypt to see plenty of proof of that. Yet the accompaniment of these civic, business, social, and domestic virtues did not take away from them the character of false religions. The terrible sacrifices they made to Moloch when they made their children to pass through the fire, were terrible confessions of sin; the sense of sin was there, and was recognized just as it is with us. Yet the sacrifices they offered were not accepted on that account. The saving value of those sacrifices, or rather the non-saving value, was indicated with absolute precision by Moses, when he said, "They sacrificed unto devils not to God." Confession of sin made to a devil is not counted as a confession made to God. Nor does the Old Testament, or the New either, give indication of any system of commutation or transfer by which expiations under a system of heathenism are accepted as good under the system of Jehovah worship. The tickets of different steamship lines are sometimes made interchangeable. There is nothing of a parallel nature in Bible remissions. Nor does it appear that the worship of Jehovah has ever borrowed anything from Baalism or Dagonism, or nature worship. If evidence to

the contrary exists, some one who knows of its existence would do well to point out its whereabouts. It will be noted also that the Old Testament writers were not given to the selection of softened expressions when describing the ethnic faiths of their day. They were spoken of as "abominations," as "filthiness," as "vanities," and as devilism.

One other point of importance is now in order. Those primitive ethnic religions were the precursors of the modern ethnic religions. They were the spiritual progenitors of certain of those "Ten Great Religions" so much under consideration to-day.

The genealogies have been well kept; the family line can be easily traced; the family likeness is well preserved. Ancient heathenism is the mother of modern heathenism. Certain features of Baal worship, or sun worship, passed over into the heathenisms of India and of Greece. Astarte worship is succeeded by Aphrodite worship, the worship of the ancient lord of the harvest by the later worship of Ceres and of the god of grain in modern times. The family relations of the gods of Egypt are imitated in the family circle of Olympus. Chemosh and Moloch

had their successors in India. The Ammonite Moloch as the flame god, or Bel as the sun god, are continued in the sun worship of the Parsees and the sun worship of Japan. The old-time hero worship is continued in China as is the original Sobe worship of heaven. The necromancies and the divinations of Phœnicia have their counterparts in the ancestor worship and Taoist superstitions of China. Cruelties quite as Satanic as were those of the valley of Hinnon have been kept up as a part of religion in India—in widow burnings and hook swingings and Juggernaut crushings—until abolished by the British government. Sacrificial usages, festival rites, mythological notions and general ideas about sin and the creation, and modes of deliverance from evil, current among the heathen in Bible times, are current among the heathen still; so that ancient heathenism and modern heathenism, so far as vertebrate column is concerned, are essentially one—one in object, one in spirit, one in antagonism to the worship of Jehovah, and one in opposition to the exclusive claim of Jehovah to be the God of the whole earth and entitled exclusively to the worship of all the children of men.

And still another point as the sequel to the one just stated. As more recent heathenism is a continuation in lineal succession of the most ancient heathenism, so there is a continuation of the antagonistic attitude of Jehovah toward it and of his purpose to destroy it utterly.

There is no intimation in the New Testament that any of the ancient threatenings are revoked. There is no evidence that the heathenism of to-day is less a usurpation of the divine prerogative than it was in the days of Moses; there is no indication that the jealousy of God burns less hotly against it than it did at Baal-Peor. It is the gospel era, and all judgments are simply held in abeyance for a time, and that is all. But when the gospel does make reference to heathenism, it is in terms of the same sweeping condemnation that were heard at Sinai. So there is no change in God's own estimate of heathenism. The sentence of death under the law is also the sentence under the gospel; the judgment of God is now, as it was then, that "they which commit such things are worthy of death." In those days no idolater was tolerated in the land; in New Testament affirmations no idolater shall inherit the kingdom of God. In the Old Testament the

idolater, or the man or the woman who enticed another secretly to go and serve other gods, was to be stoned to death; in the New Testament the idolater is to have his part in the lake of fire.

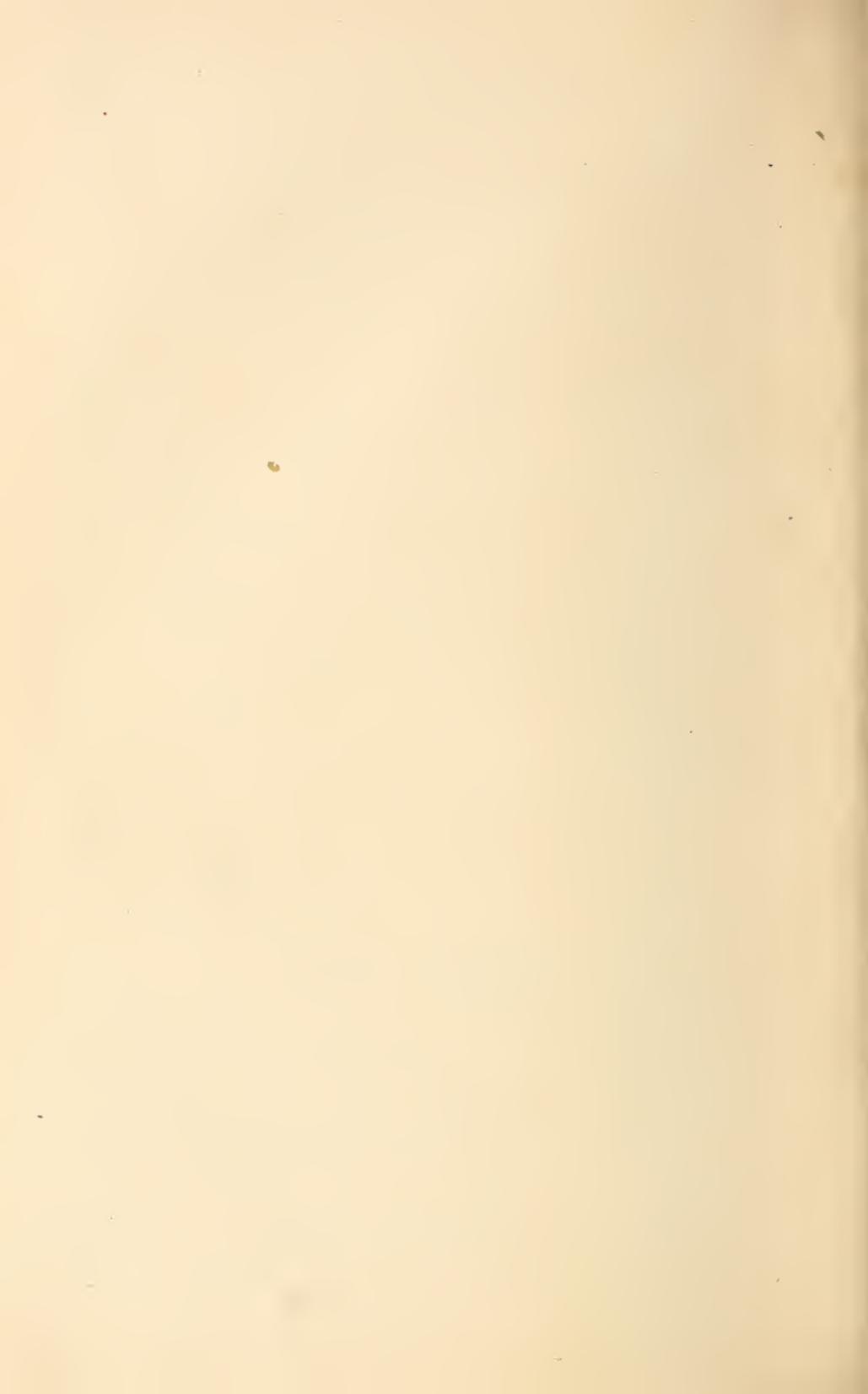
Nor can any assumption be allowed that modern heathen worship is changed in moral nature from the ancient kind. The Corinthians and the Ephesians and the Colossians were worthy and cultured peoples. They recognized a Jupiter whom some would have us consider as a sort of Jehovah by implication. In one place the people were ready to sacrifice to Paul and his companion, saying, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men." Several half-truths might have been educed from what they said, and yet their system was a lie and their sacrifices were a travesty and an abomination. Concerning them all Paul makes the all-inclusive declaration, a counterpart of the one made by Moses, "the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to devils and not to God."

Nor does it appear that New Testament theology recognizes itself as under any obligation to any of the heathen systems for any of its truths, or any of its usages, or any of its practical suggestions—none whatever. It proposes no alli-

ances ; it provides for no partnerships, no communityship of worship, no blending of creeds, no composite theologies or composite religion, no interchange of mutual compliments, no common platform of equality, and no combination of resources to establish "a universal religion." It presents the same unbroken, unyielding front that the Old Testament does. God is the same one, whose name is Jealous, and who will not give his glory to another. Christ is the same Lord of the Covenant, who will not share his dominion with another "lord," as Baal or any of his successors. Whatever may be the supposed "messages" of the so-called ethnic religions to him and his church, the message of God and of Christ to them is one. "And now commandeth he all men everywhere to repent"—repent of their idolatries and their sorceries, repent to give him glory, or else perish in their own corruption. To be sure, modern heathenism, like ancient heathenism, has good things about it. These are sometimes said to be products of heathenism when they are in reality remains of the old stock of virtues with which they started out. They have sadly suffered though in the wear and tear of their wanderings from God and are not fit to

be built into the new structure. It is in bad grace to ask or to expect it. Old garments and new cloth do not go well together. The prodigal had a fine stock of clothing when he got his portion of goods and turned his back on the old homestead; they were badly used up though after he got to feeding swine. When he came home he had nothing left but a lot of old rags. We do not read, however, that they were taken into the family wardrobe, nor did any one propose to send for a basket of the husks which the swine did eat to serve as a condiment to the fatted calf.





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