

THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

NO. 39.—JANUARY, 1897.

I. REGENERATION, REAL, NOT FIGURATIVE.

THERE are doubtless those who think that in a discussion of regeneration nothing new can be said that is true, and nothing true that is new. However this may be, it is certain that opinions differ widely, and that much confusion prevails. It is not our purpose to review the variant and widely diverse opinions which are held on this subject. That were a profitless task. We propose to study the subject anew from the standpoint of the Scriptures, and to compare the conclusion reached with the view generally accepted as orthodox. What is that view?

A very few years ago a report was made to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., by a committee appointed to revise *The Confession*. In that report the following words were found: "The act of regeneration wherein being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit he is enabled to answer God's call and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it." Had this been approved, new matter would have been added to *The Confession*. This report teaches that the act of regeneration enables the subject to believe on Christ. That this is the commonly accepted view a few citations from Doctors R. L. Dabney and A. A. Hodge may be allowed to show. Dr. Dabney in his *Syllabus and Notes* (Student's Edition, Part II., p. 85) says under the caption "Regeneration properly defined," "we prove that regeneration is not a mere change of human purpose, occurring in view of motive; but a supernatural renovation of the dispositions which determine the moral purpose and of the understanding, in the apprehension of moral and spiritual truth." Says Dr. A. A. Hodge in his *Outlines*: "In the new creation God

IV. THE LITERATURE AND WORSHIP OF THE EARLY ARYANS.

THE name Aryan is employed by philologists and ethnographers in two senses. In the wider sense it comprehends all the races included in the Indo-European family, embracing Hindus, Persians, Kelts, Germans, Slavonians, Greeks, and Italians, with, of course, all the modern nations that have sprung from these races. Very interesting and instructive it is to pursue the investigation which leads to the full conviction of the original unity of all these peoples. The evidence of language shows that all had a common ancestry. I must be content to assume here a result which no one who has studied the evidence that can be adduced in its favor will feel disposed to call in question.

But there is a more limited and, as I hold, a more correct use of the name Aryan, which confines its application to the Asiatic branches of the great Indo-European family, and so denotes by it only Hindus and Persians.

The old Sanskrit-speaking settlers in the region of the Punjab, in the northwest of India, called themselves Aryans, an honorific name denoting noble, respectable, in distinction from the aboriginal inhabitants of the country, whom they despised. And the old Persians applied to themselves a designation which is only dialectically different, which we can recognize in the alternative name given to Persia, namely, Airyana or Iran. Herodotus relates that the ancient name of the Medes was *Arioi*. Let me add that the ancient Hindus appear, both in their language and religion, more closely related to the ancient Persians than to any other branch of the Indo-European family. The old Indians and Persians, then—these are the Aryan races to whose early literature and worship I will briefly call attention.

The most ancient literary document belonging to the Aryans is the Veda, the oldest of the Hindu scriptures. The Hindu scriptures astonish us by their vastness and variety. The ancient

literature of Greece is meagre and modern when compared with that of India. There are manuscripts extant of about ten thousand separate works in Sanskrit. The question arises, How can we determine the oldest of these works? This can be done by a regard to their language, and by marking references in succeeding writings. The language of the hymns of the Rig-Veda is unmistakably archaic. It can be proved that Buddhism was prevalent in India at the time when Alexander the Great invaded it. Here, then, we have an important chronological limit in Indian archæology. Buddhism presupposes the religion of the Veda, and is, in fact, a protest against it. We can mark several distinct stages of religious development before the rise of Buddhism. Sir F. Max Mueller distinguishes four successive strata of literature that preceded it. There is the period of the Sutras which contain, in the most concise form, beside the rules of sacrifice, treatises on grammar, prosody, and philosophy. These Sutras refer to older writings, the Brahmanas, as their authority. These Brahmanas relate to the sacrificial ritual, and have appended to them the oldest treatises on Hindu philosophy, which are called the Upanishads. But still earlier is the Mantra period, when the ancient Vedic hymns were arranged as a liturgy for the priests. And, as earliest of all, we must place the period of the growth of the hymns of the Rig-Veda. They could not, it is generally conceded, have been composed later than one thousand years B. C., and some of them belong probably to a more remote antiquity. Some scholars will not allow that these hymns could have originated later than two thousand years B. C. There are no compositions in the whole Indo-European world so old as the hymns of the Rig-Veda, and, therefore, the study of them is so important as illustrating the early religion of our race.

There are four Vedas, the Rig-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, the Sama-Veda, and the Atharva-Veda. Of these, the first-named, the Rig-Veda, is by far the most important. The other three are dependent upon it, and consist largely of extracts from it, together with sacrificial rules, charms, and incantations.

When in India I had made sufficient progress in the study of Sanskrit to be able to consult the Rig-Veda, the language of

which differs considerably from what is called classical Sanskrit, the language in which the Mahabharata, the laws of Manu, and the Puranas are written. The Rig-Veda contains one thousand and twenty-eight hymns, each on an average consisting of ten verses. About five or six hundred years before Christ, Hindu scholars took the trouble of counting every verse, word, and syllable of this vast collection of hymns. There is in the Rig-Veda no hymn or prayer addressed to an idol, or to stock or stone; but there are hymns addressed to rivers, mountains, living trees, soma juice, heaven, earth, the sun, fire, the dawn, thunder, the winds, the rain, and the gods of several of the elements. The prevalent worship of the Veda is nature-worship or physiolatry. But this nature-worship is seen intermingled with polytheism, monotheism, and pantheism. The elementary forces of nature are regarded as endowed with reason and power, and are invoked as kings, fathers, protectors, benefactors. Wind, rain, fire, sun, are at times personified, and even vaguely conceived in a comprehensive way as one god. The god to whom more hymns are addressed in the Veda than to any other is Agni, Fire. Agni is the Latin *ignis*. I cannot stay to describe all the properties and works for which he is celebrated. Indra, the god of the region of the clouds, is perhaps next to Agni most frequently invoked in the Veda. Savitra, or Surya, the Sun, is next to Agni and Indra the most conspicuous god of the Veda. The fire-god, the rain-god, and the sun-god are the special objects of worship mentioned in it.

The Vedic hymns are self-contradictory. Sometimes the gods are addressed as the great and the small, the young and the old. Indra, in particular, is described as greater than all. Yet again we read: "Among you, ye gods, is none little, none young; ye are all great." Nay, more, Agni, the god of fire, is said to be Indra and Vishnu, Savitri, Pushan, Rudra, and Aditi. This means that the god of fire is also the rain-giver, the sun-god, under his various aspects, the thunderer and the infinite, the mother of all the gods.

In the worship of the Vedic gods sacrifice was employed. The sacrifice of a horse was regarded as the most important of all. Oxen, sheep, and goats were also offered. Mention is made even

of the sacrifice of a man. The most common oblation was butter, accompanied by the juice of the soma plant. The gods were supposed to be actually nourished by the offerings presented to them. But Sir Monier Williams has shown that even in Vedic times sacrifices were offered to expiate guilt, though he affirms that the earliest form of Vedic sacrifice was not piacular. The most extraordinary of all the offerings of the old Aryan worshipper was that of the juice of the soma plant, or *Asclepias acida*. It was, says Dr. Windischmann, who has written a special treatise on the soma worship of the Aryans, "unquestionably the greatest and holiest offering of the ancient Indian worship." The whole of the ninth book of the Rig-Veda, containing one hundred and fourteen hymns, is addressed to Soma. This soma was an intoxicating beverage. And yet it is worshipped as a god! Yea, Soma is called the king of the world, the king of heaven and earth, the conquerer of all. He can impart the gift of immortality, and place his worshipper in the third heaven, where life is free, where the worlds are radiant, where there is happiness and delight. When in India, I inquired where this wonderful soma juice could now be procured, but I could obtain no information regarding it. Dr. Hang succeeded in bribing a learned Brahman, in Poona, to perform in his presence the soma offering, and was even permitted to partake of the holy beverage, which gives not only health and wisdom, but immortality. Dr. Hang tells us what he found it to be: "The sap of the plant, now used at Poona, appears whitish, has a very stringent taste, bitter, but not sour; it is a very nasty drink, and has some intoxicating effect. I tasted it several times, but it was impossible for me to drink more than some teaspoonfuls." This soma, which Dr. Hang, a good German, accustomed to drink wine and beer, found so nauseous, was actually adored as a god and king of heaven and earth by Hindus in Vedic times! How shall we account for the deification of this inebriating drink? Professor Whitney finds the explanation just in the intoxicating properties which it possessed. "The simple-minded Aryan people, whose whole religion was a worship of the wonderful powers and phenomena of nature, had no sooner perceived that this liquid had power to elevate the spirits and pro-

duce a temporary frenzy, under the influence of which the individual was prompted to, and capable of, deeds beyond his natural powers, than they found in it something divine; it was to their apprehension a god, endowing those into whom it entered with god-like powers."

It is an interesting fact, as establishing the close relation between ancient Parsiism and Vedism, that the veneration of Soma is a marked characteristic of the worship of the Zend Avesta. Under the cognate name of Homa, Zoroaster prays to Soma personified. Repeatedly is he praised as the one "that drives death afar." Among other blessings which the "well-minded Homa" bestows, we are told that he "grants to those tall maidens who sit at home unmarried, good husbands, and that as soon as asked." (*Zend Avesta*, Yasna IX.)

But while the Veda abounds in the most foolish representations, and while its most distinguishing feature is the worship of nature, some of the old Vedic hymns are decidedly monotheistic in tone. They utter language which we could apply to the God whom we Christians adore. There are passages in the Veda which embody the idea of a supreme God above nature, which contrast strangely with its predominant nature-worship, and which may be fairly appealed to as relics of a not quite forgotten primitive monotheism. The hymns addressed to Varuna, the god of the firmament, present him as a holy being, the punisher of sin, and who can mercifully forgive sin. To us it is difficult to conceive how, when men had the idea of a supreme being, and had that idea embodied in a definite name, such as Varuna, they should yet address other gods, as Indra and Agni, in terms of equal praise, and make of each of them, also, the supreme being. But so it is. While the one is invoked, the other is forgotten. This is the manifest fact. The authors of the Vedic hymns had ideas, more or less correct, of a god who had power over them. They had the predicate god, and could, and did, make abusive applications of it. When we thus find in the earliest records of Hindu religious thought, amid the rubbish of nature-worship, the conception of a supreme being, the maker and lord of all, the conclusion that this idea should be looked on as the survival of a primordial revelation is the most reasonable that can be drawn. The Book of Genesis goes on the

supposition that a pure monotheism was the primitive religion, obtained in the way of immediate divine revelation; and the Apostle Paul distinctly teaches that men knew God in the beginning, but fell from this knowledge. A study of the religious ideas of the Veda and of the course of religious development in India confirms this doctrine in a striking manner.

We have now to glance at the early literature and worship of the Iranian or Persian branch of the Aryan family. Its ancient literature that has been preserved to our time is very scanty as compared with the Indian. Its oldest sacred book is called the *Zend Avesta*, or *Avesta Zend*. That word "Zend" is commonly taken to denote the language in which the Avesta is written. It really means the commentary on the Avesta, or sacred text. The Avesta is a collection of fragments, the relics of a much more extensive sacred literature. It contains laws and mythical stories, and prayers and hymns. Its interpretation is exceedingly difficult. By comparing the versions of it made by different scholars, and by the same scholars at different times, we can see the great uncertainty which attaches to the meaning of a large part of the Avesta. Its interpretation is incomparably more difficult than that of the Veda.

There are two leading ideas that lie at the foundation of the religion of both the Hindus and the Iranians. The one is the regular order of nature, its subjection to law. The other idea is that of a conflict and struggle in nature. Destructive as well as beneficent natural forces are apparent to the superficial observer. It was the influence of this latter impression that led to the dualism of the ancient Persians. Again, the consideration of the beneficent order of nature would incline the observer to monotheism. In the *Sacred Books of the East*, edited by Sir F. Max Mueller, we have translations, more or less reliable, of the several parts of the Avesta. These translations you should yourselves consult, if you wish to know the teaching of the Avesta. I venture to say that the impression which you would thus receive of the religion taught in the Avesta would be far more unfavorable than current representations of its character would lead you to expect. The Avesta contains a revelation professedly made by Ahura Mazda or Hormazd to Zarathushtra

or Zoroaster. When Zoroaster lived is a question which is still unsettled. Darmesteter, whose merit as an interpreter of Zend literature is unsurpassed, will not admit that Zoroaster can be regarded as a historical person, and treats him as a purely mythical being. This is probably carrying skepticism too far. But we may be certain that the Avesta belongs to a much later period than the Rig-Veda. Mueller describes the religion of the Avesta as "a curious mixture of monotheism, polytheism, and dualism." A pure monotheism I have not been able to discover in it; but an approach to monotheism it may be allowed to contain. Ahura Mazda, the beneficent deity, is not the creator of all things. Angro Mainyu, or Ahriman, the evil principle, was also, in the beginning, dwelling in uncreated darkness, as Ahura Mazda dwelt in uncreated light, and for every good thing that Ahura Mazda brought into existence, his rival caused a corresponding evil thing to come into being. While the one produced life and health, the other counterworked him by producing disease and death. In the very earliest part of the Avesta we find the doctrine of dualism clearly enunciated. Take the thirtieth Yasna, which belongs to the Gathas, allowed to be the most ancient and purest portion of the Avesta. In it there is solemnly proclaimed the doctrine of two original spirits, a better and a worse, each independent in his action, each finishing his part in creation, and having his separate realm. Between them and their respective followers there is incessant strife. At last the good spirit will triumph. Do not think that the worshippers of Ahura Mazda confine their adoration to him. Sun, moon, and stars, the wind, plants, the waters, the souls of departed men and animals, all good men and women still living, in short, the whole of the good creation, have prayers addressed to them. Fire, which is called Ahura Mazda's son, is especially worshipped. Hence, the disciples of Zoroaster are called fire-worshippers. Modern Parsis are offended by this designation. But they cannot deny that the worship of fire is sanctioned by the Avesta; and it is notorious that to this day the Parsis pay to fire a superstitious reverence. It is owing to this fact that they are the only oriental people who abstain from smoking. Little difference is made in Zoroastrianism between physical and moral evil.

While purity is declared to be the chief thing in religion, this purity relates principally to a physical state of body. Fire, water, and earth are holy, and they must not be polluted by a dead body. Hence, dead bodies must not be burned, or buried, or thrown into rivers. They are exposed to be devoured by birds of prey. To bury or burn a corpse is to commit an unpardonable sin. Wonderful purificatory virtue is attributed to the urine of an ox. Even in the Avesta, its use for rubbing on the body and for drinking is enjoined. Zoroastrianism does not violate the second commandment of the decalogue as it does the first. It forbids the worship of ido's as a deadly sin. In the earliest portion of the Avesta it is impossible to perceive any clear teaching of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. The progress of investigation is altogether unfavorable to the notion that the Jews first learned this doctrine from the Persians. Zend scholars, who have no sympathy with Christianity, are agreed that a bungling translation led neological commentators of a past generation to charge plagiarism from Zoroaster of the doctrine of the resurrection on some of the writers of the Old Testament. Since, however, Hormazd is the maker of the body, and Ahriman the cause of death, the final and complete victory of the former over the latter carries with it the restoration of the body. But we must not prolong our paper. In conclusion, I can say that I heartily rejoice that we can now study comparative religion more thoroughly than in any previous age. We can now with a new emphasis repeat the boast of Moses, as we compare the gods of the Gentiles with the God of Israel: "Their rock is not as our Rock." The sacred books of India and Iran reveal to us a purer worship prevailing there in the earliest times than was afterwards evolved in the course of ages. The history of religion in these lands is utterly opposed to the theory of the gradual development of religion from fetichism to monotheism. On the contrary, as Sir Monier Williams puts it, "These non-Christian bibles are all developments in the wrong direction. They all begin with some flashes of true light, and end in utter darkness." It is, I would add, the Christian Bible that has given monotheism a permanent and commanding place and influence in the world.